FEAR GOD and DREAD NOUGHT

Volume II

The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet

LORD FISHER OF KILVERSTONE

Edited by Arthur J. Marder

FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT

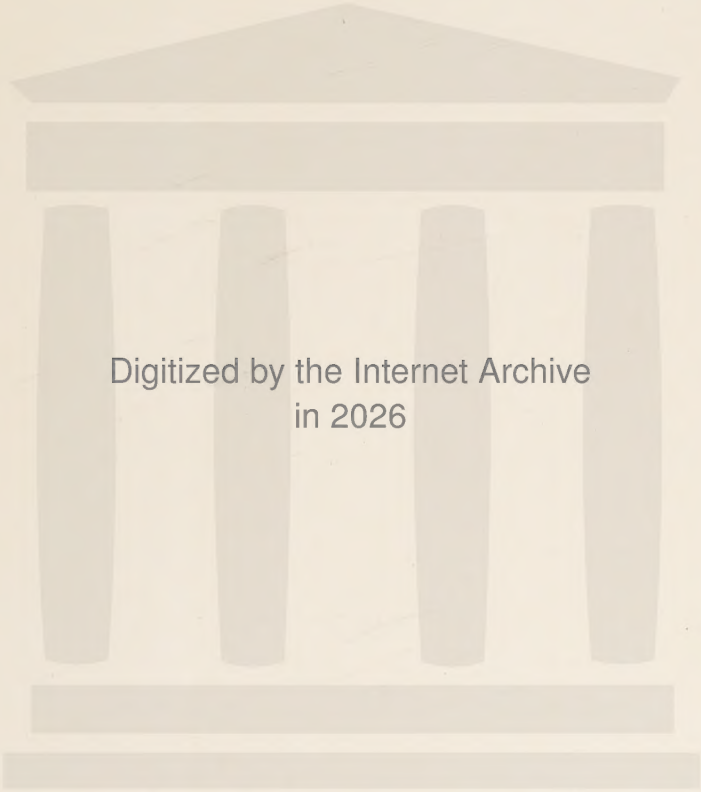
Vol. II: YEARS OF POWER

The period covered by this the second volume of *Fear God and Dread Nought* is 1904-14, the 'Fisher Era' *par excellence* in the Royal Navy. From October 1904 to January 1910 Fisher dominated the Navy as it has never been dominated before or since by a single individual. Between February 1910 and the outbreak of war he exerted a powerful influence on naval policy through the First Lords, McKenna and Churchill, and their professional advisers.

His letters make this abundantly clear, and they show, even more than those in the first volume, what an extraordinary and fascinating person he was. He kept in close touch with royalty as well as with men prominent in politics and journalism, and his correspondence reveals much about what went on before and behind the scenes in domestic and foreign affairs.

Fisher's style is unique. Buffon's dictum *le style c'est l'homme* was never so well justified. His letters are the most forthright, the most idiosyncratic and among the most amusing in the language.

Planned as a two-volume work, *Fear God and Dread Nought* has grown to a trilogy. The next volume will cover the period 1914-20.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FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT

VOLUME II

YEARS OF POWER

1904-1914

By the same author

PORTRAIT OF AN ADMIRAL:
THE LIFE AND PAPERS OF SIR HERBERT RICHMOND

THE ANATOMY OF BRITISH SEA POWER:
A HISTORY OF BRITISH NAVAL POLICY IN THE PRE-DREADNOUGHT ERA, 1880-1905

FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT

VOLUME I
THE MAKING OF AN ADMIRAL
1854-1904

FISHER IN 1904

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FEAR GOD
AND
DREAD NOUGHT

The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet
LORD FISHER OF KILVERSTONE

Selected and Edited by
ARTHUR J. MARDER
University of Hawaii

VOLUME II
YEARS OF POWER
1904-1914

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THE HERKOMER PORTRAIT, 1911 *facing p.* 367

PREFACE

When I completed the first volume of *Fear God and Dread Nought*, it was my intention to proceed with a second and concluding one. This resolve was short-lived. Fisher was always a prolific letter writer, but beginning in 1906 his correspondence becomes a torrent, more formidable with each year, excepting for a let-up of a year and a half in 1913-1914, and again in the last year or two of his life, 1919-1920. Moreover, the letters from 1904 struck me as possessing even greater interest, and certainly greater historical importance, than those of the pre-1904 years. A volume, therefore, which attempted to do the entire 1904-1920 period of the Fisher story would perforce omit as much interesting and important material as it included. Accordingly, I decided to allot two volumes to the period.

To the acknowledgements of the loan of letters made in the preface to the first volume it is a pleasure to add with gratitude the names of Mrs. Esther Hallam Meynell, Messrs. H. P. Arnholz, W. K. Stead, Peter Marsh Stanford, and R. H. Cale. The late Sir W. Graham Greene prepared for my use a helpful memorandum on Fisher's work habits at the Admiralty, and Professor Michael Lewis, of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, did the same on the development of the higher training of officers in Fisher's time. My good friends with Job-like patience, Miss Leta Smith of the Royal Archives, Messrs. H. H. Ellmers, Chief of the Admiralty Record Office, C. V. Hill, Deputy Admiralty Librarian, A. Victor Hull, Chief of the British Museum Newspaper Library, and Mrs. Helmuth R. Boeninger, a Curator of the Hoover Institute and Library, aided in the solution of a number of sticky points. The assistance of the late (second) Lord Fisher in this regard once again proved invaluable. The staffs of the Library of Congress, the British Museum, the Foreign Office, and the University of California at Los Angeles assisted in various ways, as did Rear-Admiral H. G. Thursfield, R.N. (ret.), Captain A. C. Dewar, R.N. (ret.), and Messrs. Maurice Shock, A. M. Gollin, and V. Quinn, Deputy-Librarian of Balliol.

Official correspondence (British Crown copyright reserved) has been reproduced with the kind permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office. As before, I have introduced, in text and footnotes, a few of the more interesting letters written

to the Admiral. For permission to use these I am indebted to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Librarian of the Royal Archives, Sir Owen Morshead, Sir Maurice Bonham Carter, Commander T. C. Crease, R.N. (ret.), the third Viscount Esher, the third Earl Balfour, Mr. David McKenna, and Lady Corbett and Mr. Brian Tunstall. Through the gracious permission of Sir Winston Churchill's literary trustees I have been able to refer to some of his correspondence with the Admiral.

The University of Hawaii again facilitated the project by continuing my teaching-load reduction and by putting at my disposal the perfect secretary in Mrs. Judith Tokunaga. Words could not begin to express my gratitude to Dr. Henry Allen Moe, Secretary General of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Trustees of the Foundation, for the financial assistance that has made this volume possible. This has been supplemented by a contribution from the University of Hawaii President's Discretionary Fund established by Captain Arthur E. Orvis. To President Gregg M. Sinclair and Captain Orvis I am, indeed, grateful.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my appreciation to the following publishers and individuals for permission to quote from the copyrighted material indicated: the third Viscount Esher, Ivor Nicholson & Watson, and Charles Scribner's Sons, from *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, edited by M. V. Brett and Oliver, Viscount Esher (American edition of Vols. III and IV under the title of *The Captains and the Kings Depart*); Odhams Press and Charles Scribner's Sons, from Sir Winston Churchill's *The World Crisis*; Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., from Lord Fisher's *Memories* and *Records*, and, with Lady Bacon and Doubleday & Co., from Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon's *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*; Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd. and E. P. Dutton & Co., from Lord Sysonby's *Recollections*; Lady Bacon and Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., from Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon's *From 1900 Onward*. Messrs. A. P. Watt & Son, as literary agents for Lord Esher, Lord Balfour, and Lady Bacon, have been very helpful. Through an inexcusable oversight I failed to make acknowledgement in Volume I of the kind permission of Lady Bacon, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., and Doubleday & Co., to quote material from Lord Fisher's *Memories* and *Records* and from Admiral Bacon's *Life of Fisher* and *From 1900 Onward*.

I am satisfied that I have examined nearly all the more important collections of Fisher correspondence for the 1904-14 period. About twenty letters from the Admiral to Lord Cawdor in 1905, a few

among the Balfour Papers in the British Museum, and an indeterminate number to Mr. (now Sir) Winston Churchill and the first Baron Hankey have eluded me.

I have again used the plan of rigorous selection, pruning all passages, or whole letters, of no particular interest or importance, or which duplicate closely other material of the same period. I have become more aware than before of the many inaccuracies in the texts, and not infrequently in the dating, of those letters reproduced in the Admiral's *Memories* and *Records*, and to some extent in those used by Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon in his biography. Wisely, both Admirals often omitted names and too spicy material on still living people. The need for such discretion no longer exists.

And so we resume the story of 'the best-loved, best-hated, most vital and most contentious figure in public life' in the pre-war decade. These were Fisher's most fruitful years, when he did so much to lay the sure foundations for that British command of the sea which more than any other factor won the first World War. As before, his letters — 'refreshing sea-breezes', J. A. Spender called them — exhibit the forceful personality of a remarkable man and contain explosive judgments of men and matters. Because he moved in the highest circles and wrote freely and unreservedly to his trusted friends, the letters also reveal much of the inner workings of British political as well as naval history.

ARTHUR J. MARDER

Honolulu, Hawaii
January 25th, 1955

NOTE

A number of interesting letters of the 1904-1914 period, received too late for inclusion in this volume, will be inserted as an appendix to Volume III.

PART ONE

FIRST SEA LORD, 1904-1910

CHAPTER I

ATHANASIUS CONTRA MUNDUM

1904-1908[1]

WHEN he returned to Whitehall in 1904, Fisher was a man of sixty-three — 'of medium height and square of build, with very round, wide-open [light grey] eyes, which fixed the gaze and compelled attention. His general expression was slightly supercilious, which, however, was constantly changing during conversation to a flickering smile, for an undercurrent of humour always pervaded his general talk'.[2]

In effect, if not in fact, he was the Board of Admiralty between October 21st, 1904, and January 25th, 1910. He was at the same time one of the most interesting personalities of the twentieth century. He owed nothing to influence, wealth, or social position, but everything to sheer ability, character, and perseverance. As he said: 'I entered the Navy penniless, friendless and forlorn. I have had to fight like hell, and fighting like hell has made me what I am.'

He was noted for his sense of humour, story-telling ability, sparkling wit, gaiety, charm, and boyish enthusiasm. He kept the heart of a child, and this was no doubt the secret of his amazing vitality and freshness. No man inspired closer or more affectionate friendships and among such different walks of life. (In 1911, Alan Burgoyne named a newborn daughter 'John' after him!) This was in

[1] For some of the details of Fisher's tenure as First Sea Lord, 1904-1910, and of some of the facets of his character and personality, see especially his *Memories* (London, 1919), pp. 1-21, 42-7, 102-12, 128-9, 231-9, *Records* (London, 1919), pp. 21-9, 97-172, 204-6, 225-7, 232-3 (both volumes hereafter cited by title only); and his articles, 'Lord Fisher on the Navy', *The Times*, September 8th-13th, 1919; Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon: *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (2 vols., London, 1929), I, 227-304, II, 1-115, 181-3, and *From 1900 Onward* (London, 1940), pp. 91-182, *passim*, 322-8; Arthur J. Marder: *The Anatomy of British Sea Power* (New York, 1940), pp. 483-545; M. V. Brett and Oliver, Viscount Esher, eds. (Vols. I-II, III-IV, respectively): *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (hereafter cited as *Esher*) (4 vols., London, 1934-1938), II, *passim*; Stephen McKenna: *Reginald McKenna, 1863-1943* (London, 1948), pp. 63-91; 'Character Sketch. Admiral Fisher', *Review of Reviews*, February 1910 (by W. T. Stead); A. G. Gardiner: *Pillars of Society* (London, 1913), pp. 344-54; and Esther Meynell: *A Woman Talking* (London, 1940), pp. 63-87. There is no attempt at completeness in these introductory essays. Further detail will be found in the present writer's projected full-length study of British naval policy in the 'Fisher Era', 1904-1919. The quotations from parliamentary debates and public speeches in chapter introductions and footnotes are from Hansard and *The Times* respectively.

[2] Bacon: *Fisher*, I, 246-7.

part because he was such good company; in part because he was kind, warm, and generous, and most solicitous about the health and general well-being of his friends; and in part because of his absolute loyalty to them. As he wrote Pamela McKenna in 1910: 'A note for the First Lord who did so good a turn to me when I could do him no more good. "The best trait in a man's character is an anxiety to serve those who have obliged him once and can do so no more." (*Found in an old book.*)'

In his official capacity he could be arrogant, stern, unrelenting, and, when mistakes were made, even cruel. And yet he could be tender-hearted, affectionate, and rather sentimental. He was very appreciative of anything done for him, and he never failed to respond to the smallest sign of affection, admiration, or gratitude. His 'cruel mouth' needed little provocation to smile, a smile that completely altered his expression. Children, those wise critics, loved him. He was enchanting to them, whether playing with them or letting them try on his admiral's coat blazing with stars. Women, too, found him attractive, and he enjoyed the society of attractive women. It was all harmless enough, as brought out in this quotation, a 'tit-bit' he sent to some ladies: 'What a man really likes is to be a saint with the reputation of being a bit of a devil. A woman likes to be a bit of a devil with the reputation of a saint.'

At bottom he was a humble and lovable human being. His humility was born of deep religious conviction.

> He had a firm belief in Divine intervention in the affairs of this life; if he had doubts about justice in this world, he had none about matters being evened out in the next! 'The Lord God of recompense will surely requite' was the thought with which he was wont to comfort himself, drawing from it almost Davidian consolation.[1]

The early service saw him, when at the Admiralty, in almost daily attendance at Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's. Three sermons a day were not unusual for him. One dean told him that he was in danger of suffering from 'spiritual indigestion'. But even more than attending services, he loved to sit in a church or cathedral and meditate.

His knowledge of the Bible was extraordinary, and he could quote Scripture like a Puritan divine. 'Often he felled an opponent to earth with a text' or capped an argument with an apt quotation

[1] *Ibid.*, I, 231.

from the Old or the New Testament. He declared that the teachings of history had no value and that 'history is a record of exploded ideas'. But he never failed to use Biblical history to point an argument or clinch a conclusion. (Nor did he hesitate to use naval history either *when it would help his cause.*)

He had neither knowledge of nor, excepting inter-ship football and cricket matches, interest in sports and games. He drank and smoked in moderation and for long periods did without them. A walk up and down a ship or garden, conversation with old friends, an insatiable reading of newspapers after dinner, a novel between dinner and bedtime, and, above all, sermons and dancing — these were virtually his only relaxations.

Few men have worked harder at their calling. Fisher retired very early, at 9.30 p.m., and was up, ready for work, at 5 or 5.30 a.m., though very often as early as 4 a.m. Much of the day's work was done in these morning hours before breakfast. At the Admiralty he was an indefatigable worker, with Sunday morning work not unusual. The King felt obliged to write him (January 8th, 1905): 'Admiral Sir John Fisher is to do *no* work on *Sundays*, nor go near the Admiralty, nor is he to allow *any* of his subordinates to work on Sundays. By command. Edward R.' This admonition had no permanent effect.

He was gifted with two other great assets of the born administrator: an exceptional memory and the 'pertinacity of a debt collector' in the pursuit of a goal. Noteworthy, too, were his unparalleled powers of persuasion, a product of his knowledge, sincerity, and forcefulness in speech and writing. When he became First Sea Lord, the heads of big shipbuilding, engineering, and ordnance firms, professors, and many other great and clever men always seemed anxious, ready, and willing to carry out his views, and with dispatch. No person in his day could get big things done quicker than could Fisher.

He was less successful in arguing a point verbally with the great politicians. This has a partial explanation in his bitter contempt of the general run of politicians, high and low — less for their want of brains than for their lack of character, especially moral courage. In his later years, he would say that the politicians had deepened his faith in Providence. How otherwise could one explain Britain's continued existence as a nation and the fact that the British Empire was never stronger and more feared?

Once a decision was reached, he did not trouble himself with the

details. He left these to the officials in the Admiralty in whom he had confidence. He was not, as he put it, 'going to keep dogs and bark myself also'. But he expected to be consulted in cases of doubt or uncertainty. He rarely used the telephone in his work, preferring to transact business in person; nor did he do much dictating. Nearly all his correspondence, official as well as personal, was in his own writing, which remained clear and bold up to the end of his life.

A vigorous, exuberant writer, he had a genius for coining telling phrases and drawing on his vast stock of anecdotes and Biblical lore. Characteristic were the expressions with which he closed his letters to intimates, such as 'Yours till death', 'Yours till Hell freezes', and the less common 'Yours till we play harps!', 'Yours "till charcoal sprouts"!' and 'Yours till the next glacial period!', and (to Arnold White on January 5th, 1912) 'Yours till we part at the Pearly Gates (you'll get in! I shan't!).'

Economy and efficiency or war readiness were the motives underlying Fisher's great reforms. The former has always been overlooked by the critics in appraising the reforms. Between the date of the Naval Defence Act (1889) and 1904 the Navy Estimates had approximately trebled under both Liberal and Conservative governments. Between 1900 and 1904 alone they had increased from £27,522,000 to £36,889,000, although there had been no corresponding increase on the part of other naval powers. The financial conscience of the House of Commons was aroused, and in the 1903 and 1904 navy debates grave protests were heard not merely from the Liberal benches, but from prominent members of the ministerial side of the House.

Fisher could not fail to be influenced by the uneasiness with which the country viewed the relentless growth of naval and military expenditure. Economies there must be. Like Napoleon, he was that very rare bird, the fighting man who considers the taxpayer. He was all the more anxious to effect certain economies, because, in his view, they increased the war readiness of the Fleet.

The reductions were effected in the estimates through the elimination of every item of expenditure that did not contribute to the fighting efficiency of the Fleet, especially through the scrapping of obsolescent ships and the reorganization of all the dockyards on business lines: 6,000 dockyard workmen and seven 'useless' foreign dockyards were got rid of. Through such ways were the estimates reduced by £3,500,000 in 1905-1906, £1,520,000 in 1906-1907, and £450,000 in 1907-1908. The 1907-1908 reduction was not more sub-

stantial because of a Treasury decision not to provide by loan for the completion of the works scheduled in the Naval Works Act of 1905 — a decision which entailed extra provision of over a million pounds in the estimates. Thereafter, certain automatic increases in the votes and above all the intensification of the Anglo-German naval rivalry ended the downward trend of the estimates.

The war readiness of the Fleet was absolutely essential in view of the rapidly developing German naval challenge. It was Fisher's settled conviction that the Germans would bide their time until they could catch the Royal Navy unprepared, since they could not hope to match it in numbers. At the selected moment and without warning they would make war on England and attempt to wrest from her the mastery of the seas. He worked and planned for a sufficient and efficient navy with that conflict always in view. Nor did he confine his preparations to the naval sphere.

Never one to stick to his last, the Admiral, with his shrewd, realistic political sense, was full of ideas on foreign policy. He was one of the architects of the Triple Entente. Regarding war with Germany as inevitable, he always maintained that Britain needed above all a quadruple alliance, with France, Russia, and Turkey as the other partners. For a naval war, he held that Britain needed especially the alliance of Russia and Turkey — Russia for the naval diversion she could create in the Baltic, and Turkey so that communications with Russia via the Black Sea would remain open. The stupidity of the official policy of alienating Turkey was a favourite theme. He was opposed to the Japanese Alliance, 'the very worst thing that England ever did for herself', and he always worked for close Anglo-American co-operation.

Much has been made of the ferocity with which Fisher always spoke on the subject of war. True, it was part of his fixed creed that 'war is the essence of violence' and that 'moderation in war is imbecility'. But there was nothing bloodthirsty about the man. In reality, he was a man of peace and it was his conviction that war was the greatest idiocy of life. Note these remarks on war, written on March 28th, 1898, when he was Commander-in-Chief of the North Atlantic and West Indies Squadron. They were addressed to an American friend, Butler Duncan, in the midst of that wave of hysteria in the United States which led to a declaration of war against Spain on April 20th. 'Personally, I hope war will not come, on account of the fearful miseries it always entails amongst those poor widows and orphans and dependent relatives whose sufferings pay for the for-

tunes of war contractors and the power of politicians, who run no risks and are bound to win.' But once war broke out, he always urged, it must not be conducted weakly. It was the duty of the British Fleet to 'hit first, to hit hard, and keep on hitting', so that by one colossal effort the enemy might be destroyed and the nation saved from all the horrors of a long-drawn-out series of indecisive contests.

Fisher's jingoism is supposed to be proved by his 'plans' for a preventive war. Now, in private conversations with intimate friends, he did put forward the idea that it would be a good thing to 'Copenhagen' the growing German Fleet before it became too strong, following the precedent of his hero Nelson in 1801 *vis-à-vis* the Danish Fleet. On at least two occasions, late in 1904 and early in 1908, he suggested this course to the King. The King's reaction the first time was, 'My God, Fisher, you must be mad!'[1] On the second occasion the King appears to have been not unreceptive. But the idea was never advanced seriously by Fisher; he realized that such action by a British Government was impossible. It was never considered by the Board and it was never part of British naval policy in the Fisher administration.

Fisher was certainly not an alarmist. 'Scare' statements about German invasion plans and dreadnought programmes were branded as 'silly' and 'very mischievous'. His quiet confidence in the Royal Navy was in the best traditions of the service. As regards the controversial invasion problem, he was most decidedly a member of the 'Blue Water School', which represented the thinking of the Admiralty and the Navy at large on the 'invasion bogey'. To this school the Fleet was the absolute and one and only bar to invasion. Invasion would never be attempted, history taught, until an enemy had established control of the sea and his communications were secure. To assign to the Army a co-responsibility with the Navy for the defence of the United Kingdom was to misconceive the fundamental principles of the problem. Money spent on fortifications and a large army for home defence was for the most part money wasted. Worse still, it deprived the Navy of the money that would make it invincible. To the argument of the soldiers (the 'Bolt-from-the-Blue School') that the Fleet might be lured away, the retort was that, whatever its possibility in Nelson's day, it was practically impossible in an age of

[1] As told by Fisher to J. A. Spender late in 1904 (?); Spender: *Life, Journalism and Politics* (2 vols., London, 1927), II, 67-8. Spender gives the date as 'somewhere about the year 1903', at their first meeting; but they did not meet until the end of 1904.

steam and wireless, when ship movements were far more certain and when touch could be far more easily maintained. Fisher considered (1908) that one lot of 12,000 men was the most an enemy could land, and that 'as a precautionary measure for the confidence of the country' two divisions of regular troops should always be left in the country.

Fisher has often been reproached for excessive preoccupation with the matériel as distinct from the personnel of the Navy. Actually, it was always his fundamental belief that the man was more important than the machine — that the officers and men, their skill, resource, and readiness to respond to any emergency, were the elements in sea power which were of paramount importance. He practised what he preached.

The most significant of the personnel reforms was the 'Selborne Scheme' of 1902, which has been described elsewhere[1] and which was launched in 1903-1905. A democrat, and perhaps even a socialist at heart, he wanted to see all fees abolished at Osborne and Dartmouth Naval Colleges, so that entry to the commissioned ranks of the Navy could be thrown open as widely as possible. He was well in advance of the class prejudices of the officers' corps when he declared that 'the true democratic principle is Napoleon's "*La carrière ouverte aux talents*"!' But his main tack was 'the far higher ground of efficiency': the wider they spread the net, the more likely they were to catch Nelsons in it. His campaign finally bore fruit after he left the Admiralty: in 1913 fees were reduced nearly 50 per cent for one quarter of the entrants in any year. This was a step in the right direction. In 1947 the principle of free education for all naval cadets was introduced.

The higher training of officers, long neglected, was given a fillip during Fisher's tenure at Whitehall. While in the Mediterranean he was instrumental in the early development of a full-fledged naval war college at Greenwich. Though held in the same range of buildings as the Royal Naval College, it was entirely distinct from it. The courses at the former were strictly technical courses for the training of sub-lieutenants, naval instructors, etc. The 'War Course College', set up in 1900 for commanders and captains, was compulsory (that is, it became an 'appointment', like any other appointment carrying full pay), and included naval history, strategy, tactics, and international law in its basic syllabus. Fisher had it moved to Portsmouth

[1] *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 243-7. The second Earl of Selborne was First Lord of the Admiralty, 1900-1905.

in 1906, renamed it the 'Royal Naval War College' (1907), and expanded its functions (1908) to include the investigation of problems sent down to it from the Naval Intelligence Department at the Admiralty. The College was moved back to Greenwich after World War I and survives today under the name of 'Senior Officers' War Course', or, unofficially, the 'Naval War College'.

Then there was the marked progress in gunnery. With Fisher and Captain (afterwards Admiral, first Baronet) Percy Scott playing the leading roles, a gunnery renaissance took place after 1900. It received fresh impetus when Fisher took the helm at the Admiralty and instituted, in 1905, the office of Inspector of Target Practice (first held by Scott) and long-range battle practice. By 1908 most ships were making much better shooting at 6,000 and 7,000 yards than they had done at 2,000 yards a few years earlier.

Fisher was always keenly interested in the welfare of the lower deck. Accordingly, with the better war training for the men he made a good start towards removing the long-standing grievances of the lower deck with regard to food, quarters, and discipline. 'What has passed unobserved is what I am most happy about during my years at the Admiralty in what has been done for the Lower Deck, and I was looking forward to still more!' So he wrote Lionel Yexley, Editor of *The Fleet*, the organ of the lower deck, on June 1st, 1909. Again to Yexley (October 12th, 1909): 'I am greatly touched by your kindly words that I have the sympathy of the Lower Deck. I hope when I have finished to be able to say I've done more for the Lower Deck than ever done before!' It was no accident that the Admiral was known to every sailor by the democratic nickname of 'Jacky' Fisher. Complaints continued, especially regarding pay, discipline, and professional prospects. But Fisher's concern with the welfare of the men, carried on by Churchill in the last pre-war years, resulted in a higher morale which was to bear handsome dividends in 1914-1918.

Fisher's major reforms were (1) the introduction of the nucleus crew system; (2) the scrapping of obsolete warships; (3) the redistribution of the fleets in accordance with modern requirements; and (4) the introduction of the all-big-gun type of battleship and cruiser. The first three were announced, and the fourth foreshadowed, in an Admiralty memorandum of December 6th, 1904. The first three were closely interdependent. Each was part of a whole, Fisher maintained.

The principle of the nucleus crew system was to make the fighting

ships in reserve as nearly efficient as possible to the fleet in commission. Under the old system the ships of the Navy were either fully manned and in commission or else in reserve, not manned at all, distributed between the Dockyard Reserve and the Fleet Reserve. The ships in the Dockyard Reserve were either obsolete ships partially dismantled and unlikely to be commissioned except in the last emergency, or ships undergoing heavy repairs. The Fleet Reserve was made up of ships undergoing minor repairs and ships available for service but not immediately required. These ships had no crews but were looked after by a handful of men known as a care-and-maintenance party. Upon mobilization for manœuvres the Fleet Reserve ships were manned *ad hoc* partly by Royal Naval Reserve men, and in any case by complements totally unfamiliar with their ship. The value of these reserve ships in war was problematical, as proved by their frequent breaking down in manœuvres and by the results of firing practice.

Under the Fisher reform, the effective War Fleet was divided into two categories — the Fleet in commission at sea and the Fleet in commission in reserve. The ships of the latter were provided with a two-fifths complement, consisting of the most important ranks and ratings. The nucleus crew lived on board, and by means of drills and practice cruises became thoroughly acquainted with the ship and her idiosyncrasies. When mobilization was ordered, or if hostilities broke out, the crews could be completed quickly from the shore barracks and instructional establishments at Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham. Fisher rightly called the nucleus crew system 'the keystone of our preparedness for war', since it rendered the whole seagoing fleet as 'instantly ready for war' as was compatible with peace conditions and a peace establishment. There was, however, at the start no personnel surplus for the new system.

The only economical way to provide the personnel for the nucleus crew system, Fisher reasoned, was to reduce the seagoing fleet by scrapping ships of comparatively small fighting value. Scattered over every ocean and sea on the planet were a large number of isolated, miserable little gunboats, sloops, and second- and third-class cruisers, employed in police duties of no great importance or in 'showing the flag'. The system was a survival of the days before steam, the telegraph, and wireless, when it took a long time to summon naval assistance in any emergency. These ships could fight no modern warship larger than themselves, even when they could fight at all, and their speed was insufficient to enable them to run

away. Their officers and crews rusted for lack of training with modern weapons, and rarely could the officers gain any experience of fleet evolutions and other combined exercises during the whole of the commission.

On Fisher's initiative this antiquated and pernicious system of locking up fighting complements in ships that could not fight was at last discarded. Due provision was made for such police purposes as were still deemed necessary. The other ships were recalled and paid off. Such of them as were not adaptable for some of the auxiliary purposes of war were either broken up or sold out of the service. The policy of scrapping did not end here. It had long been the practice to keep in the reserves, but still on the active list of the Navy, a sizable number of interesting, but more or less useless, survivals of a period of rapid constructive evolution. Keeping these vessels in any sort of effective repair involved a considerable charge on the annual Navy Estimates. In the end, 154 ships were struck off the effective list in 1905 'with one courageous stroke of the pen', as Balfour described it, or, as Fisher expressed it, by a measure that was 'Napoleonic in its audacity and Cromwellian in its thoroughness'.

The advantages of this audacious stroke were that it cleared the naval harbours, where many of these ships had occupied valuable berthing space, adding to the ever-growing congestion; it stopped unproductive expenditure on repairs and upkeep; and, most important of all, it provided the personnel for the nucleus crew system.

The redistribution of the Fleet to meet strategical ('and not sentimental') requirements was the crowning stroke of all. The distribution had been determined in the sailing-ship era, when sea voyages were long and when squadrons to protect trade had to be distributed widely. There were nine squadrons or fleets in 1904. The advent of steam and cable communications, later the wireless, lessened the need for many isolated foreign squadrons. The entire distribution system was rendered wholly obsolete by the Japanese Alliance (1902), the French Entente (1904), the excellent relations with the United States and Italy after 1898, and by the fact that, since the autumn of 1902, the Admiralty had looked upon the German Navy as *the* potential opponent of the Royal Navy. No special effort was made to conceal the fact that the rearrangement of naval forces in home waters was due principally to the German Navy menace.

The squadrons in the Pacific and South Atlantic were abolished. The next step was to concentrate the Fleet where it belonged — in

home waters in the neighbourhood of the potential enemy, Germany. In 1904 nearly all the most modern ships were stationed in the Mediterranean (twelve battleships). The Channel Fleet got the next best of them (eight battleships) — and that fleet was not always in the Channel — and the residue (eight battleships of earlier types) was considered good enough for the direct defence of home waters (the Home Fleet). In place of this disorganization, Fisher established three large fleets in home waters. The Home Fleet was renamed the Channel Fleet and was increased to ten battleships of newer classes, and thus made considerably more powerful. With its centre at Dover, the Channel Fleet cruised between the coast of Ireland and Gibraltar. The Channel Fleet was renamed the Atlantic Fleet. It retained its eight battleships, but now they consisted of ships of the latest class. This fleet, with its permanent base at Gibraltar, was intended to act as a reinforcement either to the Mediterranean Fleet or the Channel Fleet. The Mediterranean Fleet, based on Malta, was reduced from twelve to eight battleships. The Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets were to carry out combined manœuvres twice a year, the Atlantic and Channel Fleets, once a year.

It was still felt necessary to keep five battleships in China (ordered home in June 1905) and a strong squadron in the Mediterranean, but a concentration in home waters was in process of being made. In essence, the new distribution scheme meant that three-quarters of Britain's battleships would be readily available against Germany. The centre of strategic moment in European waters had been transferred to the North Sea. 'The Navy also sees the great strategic advantages of our Fleets exercising where they are likely to fight. As Nelson said, "The battle ground should be the drill ground".'[1]

Fisher's genius was most at home in the realm of matériel. Here his great achievements were the introduction of the two revolutionary types, the dreadnought and the battle cruiser. The essentials of the *Dreadnought* design were ready by 1904, the sketch design by October 21st, when Fisher returned to the Admiralty. The final design was selected in March 1905 by a Committee on Designs, composed of seven civilian experts and seven naval officers, under Fisher's chairmanship. The keel-plate was laid in October 1905, the ship was launched in February 1906, and was completed in December 1906. The novel features of the 17,900-ton *Dreadnought* were (1) speed: 21 knots, or two knots faster than any battleship building or afloat; (2) a main battery of ten 12-inch guns, which represented

[1] Fisher memorandum: 'Notes Prepared for the First Lord', July 1906.

a great advance from the four 12-inch and the four or ten 9.2-inch guns which constituted the primary armament of the last pre-dreadnought battleships; (3) the absence of secondary armament except for light quick-firing guns to repel torpedo attack.

Not once in any of the source materials on the origins of the *Dreadnought* is Germany mentioned even indirectly. This should dispel the myth that the ship was designed to act as a deterrent to Germany's naval ambitions by making her Fleet obsolescent and through entailing the widening and deepening of the Kiel Canal. The truth is that technological, strategical, and tactical considerations, which were buttressed by the lessons of the Russo-Japanese War and by the knowledge that other powers were contemplating the introduction of the all-big-gun battleship, prepared the ground for the *Dreadnought*.

The Committee on Designs also reported on the design for the *Invincible*, a new and larger type of armoured cruiser. The *Invincible* displaced 17,200 tons, was designed for 25 knots, and had an all-big-gun armament. There was nothing between the eight 12-inch guns and the anti-torpedo-craft guns. With the speed and armament, the the main desiderata, fixed, only a medium armour protection was possible.

The *raison d'être* of the battle cruiser was threefold: to have armoured ships (1) to act as super-scouting cruisers, ships fast and powerful enough to push home a reconnaissance in the face of an enemy's big armoured cruisers; (2) fast enough to hunt down and destroy the fastest armed merchant raiders, especially the 23-knot German transatlantic liners, which were known to be carrying guns for commerce destruction in war; (3) to act as a fast wing reinforcing the van or rear of a battle fleet in a fleet action. The genesis of the type was sound, as the existing armoured cruisers could not fulfil any of these tasks. It is unfortunate that the ships came to be called, from 1912, battle cruisers, for they were not intended to stand up to battleships not already engaged with other battleships. Their third function was the least important and tended to obscure their primary duty, which was (1).

To Fisher the Navy owed the adoption of the turbine engine, the construction of the first rigid airship, the beginning of the substitution of oil fuel for coal (he also did everything possible to ensure the supply of oil for the Navy, and to develop new sources of supply), and the introduction and improvement of the submarine.

Fisher was among the few British naval officers prior to the war

to foresee the offensive possibilities of the submarine. He therefore did all he could to build up a strong submarine fleet, even after he left office in 1910. He has been taken severely to task by latter-day critics for his responsibility in developing a weapon which could be used only to the disadvantage of the stronger naval power, and which provoked the Germans 'reluctantly' to follow his example, and then having done nothing to counteract the new danger. To these charges the Admiral would have answered (1) that the development of the submarine was inevitable — that technical progress, as with the battleship, could not have been stemmed; (2) that Britain's submarine experience was an absolute prerequisite for the development of antidotes; and (3) that had his warning been heeded, preparations to neutralize the U-boat threat could have been made in time, for with uncanny foresight he had, in memoranda of June 24th, 1912, and January 1914 to Churchill and the Cabinet, predicted the coming of U-boat piracy: the use of submarines to sink merchant ships. 'I do not believe this would ever be done by a civilized Power', was the comment of the First Lord, Winston Churchill (January 1st, 1914).[1]

Despite Fisher's confidence and the support of many eminent politicians and high-ranking officers, some of the reforms gave rise to bitter controversy in the service. Only the nucleus crew system was generally well received. In the case of the Selborne Scheme of 1902, the opposition became especially noisy after 1905, when the scheme was in full working order. Some of the criticism was based on a misapprehension of what the Admiralty policy really was. Critics spoke as though 'interchangeability' were intended to make one and the same officer qualify for service as an expert in many different capacities. There were objections of a snobbish nature, as the executive officers continued to look upon the engineers as their social inferiors and pictured engineering as a dirty occupation fit only for the 'greasers', as the engineers were called. In view of this prejudice against the engineering branch, it was natural that an insufficient number volunteered for it. Among the more thoughtful critics the reform was opposed chiefly on these interrelated grounds: (1) There was great danger that concentration on engineering would inevitably tend to displace the study of tactics and strategy; (2) proficiency in any one of the three branches demanded the whole

[1] Winston S. Churchill: *The World Crisis* (4 vols. in 5, London, 1923-1929), II, 280. Note that the page references to *The World Crisis* in this volume are always to the English edition, whose pagination is different from that in the American edition.

time and talents of the aspirant; (3) the duties of a deck officer and an engineer were totally distinct and different, and the increasing complication in engines and boilers called for the undivided attention and further and deeper specialization of a special class of engineer officer.

In one particular the original scheme had to be altered as early as 1906. It quickly proved impracticable to give young marine officers the same education as other officers and, so far as the marines were concerned, the scheme was now abandoned. Marine officers continued to be entered separately. The only other important change down to the war came in Churchill's time, in August 1912, when the age of entry to Osborne was raised to $13\frac{1}{2}$, so as to correspond with the age at which boys finished their preparatory school work, and in March 1913, when a supplementary scheme of entry — a special entry for public school boys — was introduced to cope with the threatened shortage of officers. Other portions of the scheme were dropped or altered after World War I, particularly as regards engineering officers.

Despite modifications, the system justified the faith of its warmest advocates, and with all the changes the fundamental principle of the Selborne Scheme still obtains, although confined to the executive branch: the fighting seaman, whether bluejacket or executive officer, must be well versed in all the mechanical appliances with which a modern navy is equipped. In another main feature, that of officering the engineering and executive branches from the same source — that is, unification of entry — the original scheme basically holds good. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield rates the 1902 scheme as among the five 'most successful' of Fisher's reforms.[1] The Admiral might not have agreed, as in later life he asserted that the 1902 scheme had been 'spoiled by the schoolmasters'.

The scrapping policy was assailed by a large section of the service. Four arguments were used. First, it denuded distant stations of police forces and lowered British prestige through the disappearance of the flag. Second, and this was the crucial point, it was alleged that the scrapping policy deprived the Fleet of ships which would have been very useful in the multifarious tasks of trade protection in war. Third, and closely related, it was charged that nothing was being built to replace the scrapped cruisers, or, more specifically, that the Board was neglecting the construction of small cruisers. (Excepting a very few that were built earlier, unarmoured and 'protected'

[1] Lord Chatfield's letter of March 14th, 1946, to the writer.

cruisers were built only from 1908, and then in modest numbers to replace the obsolescent vessels of their class.) To send large armoured cruisers to run down commerce destroyers was, it was said, absurd; moreover, they would probably be wanted for other purposes. Fourth, historical arguments were trotted out to support the contention that large numbers of small ships were essential to the conduct of the varied operations of naval war.

The fact is that Fisher did make due provision for such police purposes as were still necessary, and four powerful armoured cruiser squadrons were employed to show the flag in imposing force whenever it was deemed advisable. As regards the second and third charges, revolving about the problem of trade protection, Fisher believed that the attack on trade, if undertaken on a grand scale at all, would be carried out by powerful cruiser squadrons. Small ships, therefore, were ineffective for commerce protection. The Admiralty was developing the large cruiser, so that, after a sufficient number had been assigned to mask those of the enemy, the remainder would be available to destroy any small ships which might be foolish enough to wander about British routes. The critics found their justification in the first World War, when from beginning to end England never had a sufficiency of cruisers for trade protection. However, it should be noted that it was the ruthless submarine warfare on commerce which led to the critical situation of 1916-1917, and that not until the very eve of the war was it realized, by Fisher and only a few others, that the submarine might be used against British shipping.

What of the fourth charge? Fisher asserted that Britain's protected cruisers were useless as scouts or for raiding an enemy's commerce. A single fast armoured cruiser would lap them all up 'like an armadillo let loose on an ant-hill'. He did not see how war vessels could influence land operations except by forbidding the enemy free maritime transport of troops or matériel. This could be done better by using fast powerful ships than weak and slow ones, even if greater numbers of the latter were available. Under no condition was it intended to use warships to attack forts or take towns. Here again history proved the critics right: in the war the Navy never had enough small craft.

Then there was the dreadnought policy. The battle of the pens began on the day the ship was launched. Fisher's critics derided the dreadnought policy chiefly on the ground that it rendered all existing battleships obsolete, so sweeping away Britain's overwhelming pre-

ponderance in battleships (about three to one over Germany) and giving the Germans a level, or nearly level, start in the competition for naval supremacy. Fisher never denied that the introduction of the *Dreadnought* was tantamount to starting *de novo*, since the vessel, in his opinion, was equal to any two and a half battleships then existing. But he knew that the all-big-gun battleship was inevitable. Every indication in 1904-1905 pointed to the dreadnought as the battleship of the immediate future. The Germans and the Japanese were giving the matter serious attention, and the American Navy was planning to build dreadnoughts. This being the situation, it was imperative for Britain to get the jump, particularly as the Germans were building warships in about the same time as the English.

There were also weighty technical objections to the *Dreadnought* and her successors. The lead here was taken by able officers of large experience, who received support from the hard-hitting writings of Captain Mahan and the onetime Director of Naval Construction (1885-1902), Sir William White. The two principal charges were these: (1) The dreadnought sacrificed armament to gain speed. Following Mahan, the critics held that speed was of secondary importance compared to armament: superior speed might not always be of strategical value, and, tactically, its use had been greatly overestimated; (2) there was no justification for the elimination of secondary armaments; a proportion of 6-inch guns and rapid-firing guns of small calibre should be retained. Much was made of the claim that Tsushima had been won by the Japanese with the rapid hitting of their 6-inch guns rather than with their heavy guns, and that their experience in the war had led the Russian and Japanese authorities to continue the use of secondary armaments.

The Admiralty rebuttal, put as briefly as possible, made these points: (1) Strategically, superior speed enabled a fleet to concentrate at any desired spot as quickly as possible, or to overhaul a fleeing squadron; tactically, 'it enables you to force or to decline an action, once in touch with the enemy. It gives you the choice of the range at which the action is to be fought, and the power of maintaining that range. With superior speed you can envelop the enemy's line, and you can keep out of range of his torpedoes'.[1] (2) 'In quoting the battle of Tsushima, it should be remembered that neither fleet possessed any knowledge of long-range hitting. Control of fire, which alone makes long-range hitting possible, was not adopted by

[1] Admiralty memorandum: 'The Modern Battleship', October 1906.

the Japanese until two years after the war. Hence the range at Tsushima and the gunnery deductions drawn are unreliable.'[1]

It was, as Admiral Bacon has said, a tragic fact about the situation that the country could not be told the whole truth. It was felt inadvisable to publish technical arguments in support of the *Dreadnought* and *Invincible*, since they were based on data which the Admiralty was bound to treat very confidentially — the results of battle practice carried out by the Fleet and on conclusions drawn from the Japanese Fleet actions.

One important concession was made to the critics. So long as a torpedo craft had to come within a range of a few thousand feet of her prey before she could hope to discharge her torpedo with any reasonable prospect of success, it might be safe to rely on an armament of 3-pounder guns to stop her in time. But when the range of the torpedo rapidly grew to 7,000 yards, and destroyers became larger, it manifestly became necessary to employ a much heavier armament to stop the torpedo craft in time. Hence all dreadnoughts built subsequently to the original *Dreadnought* were furnished with an anti-torpedo armament of sixteen or more 4-inch or 25-pounder guns. Finally, after some thirty dreadnoughts had been built, the Admiralty came back to the 6-inch battery (twelve 6-inch or 100-pounder guns) in the 'Iron Duke' class (1911-1912 programme). Fisher was not enthused over what he regarded as a retrogression.

The criticisms of the battle cruiser followed the same general lines as in the case of the dreadnought. It was charged in World War I and afterwards that Fisher's designs, especially the battle cruiser, failed to meet the test of battle. It is a fact that the British dreadnoughts and battle cruisers lacked the solid protection given their German opposites by Tirpitz. 'Hitting is the thing, not armour', asserted Fisher. (His pre-war critics generally emulated him in underestimating the importance of armour protection in capital ships.) All the same, the British dreadnoughts met the test of battle at Jutland, their only major test in World War I. And despite criticism that the battle cruisers did not fare well because armour had been sacrificed to speed, they proved their worth at the Falklands and elsewhere, and they came out of Jutland as well as the badly mauled German battle cruisers. But for the defective magazine arrangements and misuse of the British battle cruisers at Jutland, two units would not have been lost.

[1] Fisher's printed commentary on Sir George Clarke's paper of September 1907 on 'The Effectiveness of Naval Fire'.

Fisher met with opposition to his reforms from the very start. A few weeks after he assumed office, he wrote: 'I am still hard at it, fighting *de die in diem* . . . all the Admirals are pretty well against me, except those who are worth anything!' But during the first two years the opposition did not ruffle him too much. While at times he could be maddened to the point where, as on May 12th, 1905, he 'wished to God I could bite them! I will if I get a chance!', his usual mood was expressed by the hope (May 28th, 1905) that 'attacks "fizzle" out if let alone', and by his reference in a July 1906 memorandum to the 'insignificant agitation' over the reforms.

The turning point came in the summer and autumn of 1906. From that time the feud was really on. On December 4th, 1905, shortly before it resigned, the Conservative Government laid down, in the 'Cawdor Memorandum', the shipbuilding policy which it would be necessary for England to follow in the future: four large armoured ships (that is, dreadnoughts and battle cruisers) a year. This programme was provisionally accepted by Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal Government. But after the 1906-1907 estimates, which had been completely worked out by the Cawdor Board, had been approved by Parliament, the Government had a change of heart. It argued that Britain had got such a jump in dreadnought construction (one dreadnought and three battle cruisers were building under the 1905-1906 programme) that it was safe to mark time. It was impossible for the Admiralty to defend the laying down of four dreadnoughts in 1906, since not a single dreadnought or battle cruiser had been laid down by any European power, and none were immediately in prospect. Fisher and his colleagues were therefore amenable to dropping one big ship of the 1906-1907 programme; if there was no evidence of unusual shipbuilding activity on the part of their potential enemies, another armoured vessel would be dropped from the 1907-1908 programme. The Government proposed to go further, believing that the Hague Conference of 1907 would be helped by Britain's moderation in her building programme. The Board was induced to agree to insert only two armoured ships in the 1907-1908 estimates, with a third to be laid down if the Conference was unsuccessful in reducing armaments, which turned out to be the case.

These changes in the Cawdor Memorandum were announced in the House of Commons on July 27th, 1906. The Parliamentary Opposition, the big-navy press, and the Navy League castigated the Sea Lords for permitting the Government to use them 'as a cloak

for its cowardice' and allowing themselves to be made the 'tools of the Little Englanders'. Fear was expressed that the reductions were but the entering wedge and that the traditional two-power standard was threatened. These rumblings of discontent flared into a minor navy scare which reached its peak in October. Fisher thought the scare was ridiculous in view of the fact that in 1907 they would have ten dreadnoughts and battle cruisers built or building while foreign navies would hardly have begun any.

But the agitation over the reduced building programme was a mere zephyr compared to the storm that burst when the Admiralty, on October 23rd, issued a memorandum that marked the evolution of a new Home Fleet. It was a logical development of the 1904 redistribution scheme. Instead of all the reserve vessels being in three independent divisions under three commanders-in-chief, who did not take them to sea, they were now formed into one fleet, the Home Fleet, under the supreme command of one admiral. Only the Nore Division of this fleet, with six of the thirteen battleships composing the Home Fleet, was to be a fully manned division, to be sent to sea frequently and to be ready for instant action at all times. It was formed by the reduction of the three main seagoing fleets (Channel, Atlantic, Mediterranean). The other two divisions, stationed at Devonport and Portsmouth, represented in a more efficient form the corresponding divisions of the former Fleet Reserve; with at least three-fifths (instead of the former two-fifths) complements, it was hoped that every ship would be able to carry out practically all the exercises expected from fully manned ships, and this hope was fulfilled. Actually, these nucleus crew ships would need no more than a few hours to enable them to put to sea in an equal state of efficiency with the Nore Division. The Atlantic and Home Fleets would come under the orders of the C.-in-C., Channel Fleet, periodically for combined manœuvres and exercises.

The din of protest was ear-shattering. The Government and Sea Lords had 'betrayed' the nation; the Government was 'sacrificing the security of the Empire to the exigencies of party politics'. The specific criticism was the substitution by the Admiralty of the ideal of a 'practically ready' fleet — that is, an 'unready fleet', it was alleged — for that of a fleet instantly ready for war, because (1) the Home Fleet was not under the immediate and direct command of the Channel C.-in-C., though it would be so in war; (2) it was not concentrated, so flouted the teaching of naval history; (3) a large portion of its vessels had only nucleus crews on board; (4) it was not

being trained to act as a fleet either by itself or with the Channel Fleet. The German Fleet, an 'instantly ready fleet', was in a position to overcome the naval force which Britain could bring against it in case of a sudden declaration of hostilities followed by immediate action. The proposal made by many of the critics to undo the damage was the combination of the Channel and Home Fleets. The former lacked torpedo craft and was ill supplied with cruisers; the latter was too weak in battleships to practise tactics on the scale required in modern war. Moreover, both fleets should be trained continuously together. Again, the principle of concentration would be complied with and the training of the fleet for war would be immensely improved.

The crucial point in the Admiralty case for obvious reasons could not be made public. (The Admiralty case for most of the innovations could be presented in the press only in its broad outlines.) The underlying idea was to concentrate the strength of the Navy in home waters, and to go about it unostentatiously and by slow degrees, so as not to excite the attention of the German Admiralty. Fisher deliberately had the dreadnoughts, as completed, quietly sent to the Nore (Sheerness), saying they could not manœuvre with the older ships. In this way, quietly and (it was hoped) without being noticed by the German Admiralty, a powerful fleet of the best and fastest ships was built up, facing Germany and using the waters in which it would operate in war. Had Fisher been open about it and attached the recalled ships and the dreadnoughts as completed to the Channel Fleet, which was recognized as Britain's first fighting line in home waters, the Germans would undoubtedly have interpreted it as a menace and increased their naval strength. That, at any rate, was Fisher's thinking, though there is evidence that the Germans were not unaware of the significance of his strategy.

Fisher had, in the initial stage of the new redistribution, no intention that the Nore Division should oppose the whole German Fleet in any case. It was supposed 'to act as a deterrent to any such schemes as a sudden *coup de main* in the absence of the other squadrons . . .'[1] The Channel and Atlantic Squadrons were absent on many occasions, cruising or carrying out tactical operations in conjunction. During these times no fully manned ships had been present in English waters, and this was considered undesirable.

Utterly ignored by the critics were the repeated statements of the Admiralty, in 1906-1907, that the development of the Home Fleet must

[1] Admiralty memorandum: 'Genesis of the Home Fleet', February 1907.

be a gradual one, that seen in 1907 it was in an embryonic stage. Its full development would not be reached until 1908-1909. The Admiralty, however, declined to indicate the nature of this further development. In the summer of 1908 the 'Invincible' class and other powerful capital ships were added to the Home Fleet. This made the Nore Division superior in itself to the whole German Fleet. Finally, in March 1909 the Channel Fleet was merged in the Home Fleet, becoming its Second Division. Behind the Home Fleet, as first reinforcement, was the Atlantic Fleet. With the final phase of the evolution attained, much of the uproar over the 1906 scheme was silenced, but not all.

From the start, in 1906, the malcontents seized the opportunity to attempt to discredit anew the whole policy of the Admiralty, from the new training scheme down to the dreadnought, and with such new charges as the inadequate provision for repairing the ships of the Home Fleet, the inferiority to Germany in torpedo craft, the reduction in personnel, the neglect to provide docking accommodations for the dreadnoughts on the east coast. With the rights and wrongs of these comparatively minor charges we cannot enter here.

The 'Syndicate of Discontent', or 'Adullamites' (Fisher's pet terms), was led by most of the Conservative press and by a number of senior officers. The latter ranged from 'pre-historic fossils' (so Fisher called them) of the retired Admiral C. C. Penrose FitzGerald species to able and respected admirals on the active list like Lambton, Noel, Custance, and Beresford, and retired admirals like Richards and Bridge. Excepting a few, the critics did not damn all Fisher's innovations. They differed among themselves as to the comparative advantages to be derived from this or that change that had been made. But in general they profoundly distrusted Fisher and his works.

On Fisher's side were ranged the Liberal press (which had serious reservations only about the dreadnought and the consequent intensification of the competition in naval armaments), certain Conservative journals (notably *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Observer*, and *Review of Reviews*), the two leading service journals (*Army and Navy Gazette*, *Naval and Military Record*), and the bulk of the naval profession itself, though more especially the younger officers.

Much of the antagonism towards Fisher was involved in the very nature of the work which he had set himself to accomplish: a frightened service found itself being hustled out of the lethargy of a prolonged peace routine into a strenuous preparation for war which

flouted practically all the accepted doctrines of the Navy. Little wonder that it gave vent to a cry of agony. It was also natural, as in St. Vincent's day, that every conservative influence should rise against Fisher. Valuing tradition and custom at too high a price, many naval officers — the majority of them on the retired list — seemed constitutionally opposed to change. What was good enough for their grandfathers was good enough for them, and any variation meant that the Navy was going to the dogs.

However, the unrest and discontent were due as much to Fisher's alleged personal rule and to the methods he used to carry out his reforms. The former has to do with (1) Fisher's 'departure' from the traditional system of Board control to the existing 'one-man show', utilizing to the full the Order in Council of August 10th, 1904, by which the First Sea Lord was made solely responsible for the fighting and seagoing efficiency of the Fleet; (2) the claim that the 'reforms' had been hastily thought out and carried out with 'reckless haste' and 'without any attempt to win the co-operation of the service'; (3) the charge that Fisher surrounded himself with 'yes-men', officers who were said to be in the 'Fishpond'. This is related to the third charge below.

As regards the second category of criticisms — Fisher's methods — it was asserted: (1) that the 'reforms' had been carried out with 'public advertisement' and through an unblushing use of the press, which were at variance with naval tradition and custom, and offensive to naval sentiment; (2) that Fisher was guilty of espionage in the Fleet; (3) that, treating the Navy as his pocket preserve, he was promoting his 'favourites and sycophants', while harassing all independent officers who did not belong to the Fishpond.

Let us examine these serious charges. It is true that, as First Sea Lord, Fisher was the Royal Navy and the Royal Navy was Fisher. There were not many Board meetings; the First Sea Lord as a rule dealt with each member individually. The policies adopted were *his* policies, and everything had to be done at once, if not sooner; he did not stand procrastination of any sort. But the strong, resolute administrator will always carry his colleagues with him, and will always be denounced as an 'autocrat' by reactionary and timorous critics. Admiralty history abounds with examples of such 'autocrats' — men who through firmness of purpose and supreme driving power carry their colleagues with them and attain their objectives. At the same time it would be a serious mistake to believe that Fisher worked out all his changes and reforms personally or with a minimum of

assistance. He was open to argument, had the power of assimilating the ideas of others (with generous acknowledgement), and worked largely by appointing committees to thresh out his schemes. Indeed, all his reforms were carried out only after full consideration by committees of civil officials, technical experts, and naval officers fresh from the sea.

Were the reforms hastily thought out by Fisher? Nothing is further from the truth. They were the results of years of thinking, and of thinking tested by experience. But were they not carried out with 'reckless haste'? This brings us to a consideration of Fisher's treatment of the profession itself. He did not realize that the ultimate success of sweeping transformations could be achieved only by the hearty co-operation of all concerned and by appealing to the spirit of patriotism and sense of unity of the service. He made no attempt to convert his opponents, since conversion was wholly alien to his nature. 'Never explain' and 'it is only damn fools who argue' were favourite maxims. His closest friends remonstrated with him over the perfectly idiotic way in which he insulted and alienated many of the senior officers. 'I am going to kick other people's shins if they kick mine!' was his reply.

To convert lay opinion, Fisher made extensive use of newspaper publicity, sending favoured naval journalists what he termed 'ammunition' to support his policies. This innovation, so wholly opposed to service tradition, was deeply resented by many officers and others, who contemptuously referred to Fisher's 'journalistic janissaries'. The only defence that can be made of this practice is that, in Spender's words, Fisher acted 'from the loftiest and most patriotic of motives'. In short, the ends were good, the means rather questionable.

Concerning the espionage charge, the facts are these. Fisher used to get his information about the various fleets, not only from official sources, but from private correspondence with certain relatively junior officers, of whom Bacon, when in the Mediterranean (1906), was one. Bacon has written that 'it was an advantage to the Navy for me to point out to Sir John the weak points in the Admiralty proposals which were being discovered by the brains of those at sea . . . not one of these [letters] contained a word of criticism of any senior or junior officer on the Station; nor, with one exception . . . did I mention any of their names'.[1] But the system of encouraging confidential reports on one's superiors was regarded as detestable in

[1] Bacon: *From 1900 Onward*, p. 126.

the Navy. Rumours of the Bacon letters — of 'espionage' in the Fleet — were circulating in naval circles as early as the autumn of 1907. The real explosion came later, in 1909. Fisher, searching for ammunition against his critics, had had the letters printed in 1906 for circulation among certain selected officers. This was in dubious taste, as the letters were intended by the writer to be private. They inevitably got out — in the spring of 1909.

The charge of 'favouritism' is less valid. 'Favouritism is the secret of efficiency', Fisher wrote in the log of the *Vernon*, by which he meant selection on the basis of merit, ability, efficiency. He had owed his own chances as a young officer to the favouritism which puts seniority and family, service, and political connections on one side when there is merit lower down the ladder. He now gave other men the same chance over the heads of their seniors, so further raising up his enemies. But he did not suffer fools. 'If I haul a man up over the shoulders of his seniors, that man is going to take care to show I haven't made a mistake.' He was a relentless enemy of 'Buggins' with his social and political influence. 'Buggins's turn is the curse of the Navy. Buggins is first cousin of the Duke of Dankshire, and can't be passed over. He is an ass, but he must have his turn.' Of course the men who were pushed ahead were men in sympathy with his policies. This was particularly true of the younger men who were given key appointments at the Admiralty. But what was more natural than for a person in authority to gather round him able officers who were in sympathy with his ideas and reforms and who would work as a team? These appointments were quite unaffected by personal relationships. 'Fisher's jackals', they were called by the opposition, but they were on the whole among the most capable of the captains, men of brains and experience, who were not likely to acquiesce in any proposals that were in any way unsound. Scott, Jellicoe, Bacon, Madden, Oliver, Richmond, and Henry Jackson were among Fisher's assistants. Through this fillip to younger men, many of them were in responsible positions in 1914.

But did he not penalize those who opposed him? He was credited with a vindictive nature, and it is a fact that the most brutal threats were heaved at those who actively opposed his reforms. But his bark was generally more dangerous than his bite. During his long administration the more important commands, afloat and ashore, were often held by men out of sympathy with his views — men who in some cases carried their opposition to the verge of mutiny. This is not to suggest that he was an angel and that the spirit of vengeance

was entirely absent, for there is evidence that 'he went a good deal further than an honest adverse opinion of capacity would justify in keeping Beresford & Co.'s friends (or suspected friends) away from the jobs that would naturally have fallen to them'.[1] What is beyond dispute is that the fear of reprisals haunted those who were not in the Fishpond.

There can be no doubt that Fisher's methods, vendettas, and manœuvres were inspired by a burning patriotism and by a passionate love for and devotion to the Navy, his one absorbing interest. The efficiency and strength of the Navy, one ready for war at a moment's notice, were his megalomania. Personal success was of little account. He was pleased with the many honours that came his way, but he kept two feet on *terra firma*. He could have retired from the Navy and have made his fortune by accepting a post with one of the great armament firms. But he was never to know the pleasure of a healthy bank account. Country and Navy came first. 'I have voted consistently for both sides, whichever did most for the Navy!' he told Lord Knollys (October 23rd, 1906). Moreover, it could be argued that the violence with which he disrupted the old order of things was to some extent a necessity. He realized that unscrupulous toughness alone would shake the Navy out of its sail-and-cannon-ball mentality.

The acknowledged leader of the 'Syndicate of Discontent', though hardly the brains, was Admiral Lord Charles (afterwards first Baron) Beresford. Here was one of the most engaging personalities of the time — frank, open, dashing, impulsive, fluent. The officers and men under his command loved and admired 'Charlie B.' because of his charm, geniality, high spirits, humour, and his unvarying kindness and thoughtfulness. His professional attainments unfortunately did not match the attractiveness of his personality. He had a singular gift for handling men and getting the best out of them, he was indefatigable, and he excelled in the art of pure seamanship; but very definitely he was not a tactician or strategist of note. Nevertheless, it is only fair to point out that Beresford and his supporters honestly believed he would make a better First Sea Lord than Fisher. He had been Second-in-Command under Fisher in the Mediterranean and in those days they had seen eye to eye on many subjects. They had remained on friendly terms until the autumn of 1906, although gradually drifting apart, as Beresford opposed several of

[1] Sir Walter Nicholson to Bacon, October 8th, 1928. Nicholson had been Fisher's private secretary, 1904-1910.

Fisher's reforms. The definite break began with the fleet redistribution scheme. Thereafter Beresford, egged on by the malcontents, found more and more to criticize in Fisher's reforms. The role of being agin those in power came naturally to Beresford, a real Irishman.

As Channel C.-in-C. from April 1907, he adopted an attitude of marked antagonism. He criticized Admiralty policy, commented on Admiralty orders, and repeatedly addressed the Admiralty on many topics in a decidedly tactless and insubordinate manner quite without parallel in British naval history. His opinions of the Admiralty were known to every officer and man in his fleet. His most serious grievance, which was generally known to the public, was over the Home Fleet. It was a 'fraud upon the public and a danger to the Empire' (May 13th, 1907). He was strongly of the opinion that the command of all ships intended for the defence of home waters should be under his supreme command in time of peace as well as in time of war, so that all the ships could be trained and exercised together.

Another major criticism was that the Admiralty would not send him their war plans. Now this was true, but it was the traditional policy of the Admiralty to provide '*war orders*', not war plans. War orders contained general principles ('the general intentions of the Admiralty') upon which the executive officer was to base his movements if hostilities broke out, and included the 'nature of reinforcements to be placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief' in specified contingencies. On the basis of the war orders the commander-in-chief was expected to draw up his own war plans, which dealt with the actual disposition of the ships under his command, and to have them approved by the Admiralty. Beresford received war orders in July 1907, and fresh ones a year later, annulling the first, but found both impracticable. He later used this incident to charge that, when he took over the command of the Channel Fleet, there were no war plans, that the Admiralty had never prepared any, and that the greatest shortcoming of the Admiralty was the lack of a strategical department, a naval war staff. We shall return to this point in Chapter II.

Incidents multiplied, each straining relations further. Most serious was the paint-work incident, a *cause célèbre* of the time. On November 4th, 1907, Beresford issued an order that exercises would have to be curtailed, to enable the ships to be painted and tidied up for the forthcoming Fleet inspection by the Emperor William. Percy Scott, Rear-Admiral of the 1st Cruiser Squadron, then engaged in

carrying out a gunnery programme, lost his temper. He cancelled *all* the planned gunnery exercises, and when the cruiser *Roxburgh* asked to continue her practice, he sent her captain the signal: 'Paint-work appears to be more in demand than gunnery, so you had better come in, in time to make yourself look pretty by the 8th.' Beresford, white with suppressed anger, told Scott off in a tense scene on board the flagship. He was enraged when, after the public reprimand, he received no support from the Admiralty in his attempt to supersede Scott. He attributed this to the fact that Scott was in the Fishpond.

The paint-work incident, which quickly became public property, ushered in the most acute phase of the Beresford-Fisher vendetta and the quarrel in the Navy. It was no longer possible to conceal the existence of a feud that had split the upper ranks of the service into two camps of warring partisans, both of which were represented at Whitehall and in the Fleet. (A third group of officers adopted a neutralist position.) Gone was the 'band-of-brothers' tradition. Each side was making speeches, issuing pamphlets, and flooding those newspapers and journals predisposed to its favour with articles and letters.

How did Fisher react to the campaign against him and his policies? In January 1907 he already felt that he was, in Esher's words, 'standing on the edge of a precipice to which all great reformers are led, and over which they ultimately fall'.[1] But a fighter like Fisher did not discourage easily. 'My enemies', he wrote Knollys (January 2nd, 1907), 'keep on pegging away at me, but, as I told the Prince of Wales, my skin is like a rhinoceros and all the envenomed darts don't pierce it!' At the same time, and despite the current opinion which represented him as a man without feeling, he was cut to the heart by the attacks made upon him. 'When I retire,' he said to a friend, 'I shall write my reminiscences. I shall call them "Hell. By One Who Has Been There".' Had it not been for the loyalty of his friends, and especially of the King, he would have gone under. This was a common theme in his correspondence of these years. Thus, to Esher (December 1907): '*What wonderful friends I have!* It's a marvel! All I do is to kick their shins.' To Esher again (January 2nd, 1907): 'My enemies keep on pegging away, but so long as the King supports me I am all right, and His Majesty has done so nobly!' Without mastering all the details the King took a big grasp of Fisher's naval ideas (while dubbing his political views as 'effusions'!), had confidence in him, and consistently supported him. The King also had

[1] *Esher*, II, 215.

a deep affection for the Admiral as a person, and this was thoroughly reciprocated. 'Yesterday,' as Fisher wrote Arnold White (February 14th, 1911), 'I was going through all the late King's letters! How *human* he was! He could sin "as it were with a cart rope", and yet could be loved the more for it! What a splendour he was in the world!'

By the beginning of 1908 the schism in the Navy had become so subversive to the discipline of the service, scandalous in the eyes of the public, and dangerous to the security of the nation that all shades of press opinion were calling for a halt to the dissension. The Beresfordians sought to accomplish this by the demand, first made in January 1907 but now pressed, for an independent inquiry into Admiralty policy and the condition of the Navy. This, they said, would clear the air. The proposal only added fuel to the flames. The cry of Fisher's partisans was that discipline must be restored in the Navy — that the only way to achieve harmony was for Beresford to give up his insubordination and disloyalty, and to co-operate loyally and heartily with the Admiralty; or else haul down his flag and, if he wished, enter Parliament and argue his case there with the Admiralty spokesmen. The position of the Admiralty was explained in a memorandum for the Cabinet (January 25th, 1908): '. . . the Admiralty fear no inquiry; but it would be simply impossible for the Members of the Board to retain office if such a blow to discipline and to the authority of the Admiralty as the investigation of its fighting policy by its subordinates were to be sanctioned'. Sometime soon after, Fisher got a 'distinct promise' from the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, and his heir apparent, Asquith, that no form of inquiry into Admiralty policy would be entertained by the Government.

The row got more intense, following various incidents in the spring and summer. There was Beresford's disgraceful behaviour at the levee in May. In full view of the King, ministers, and naval officers, he refused to take Fisher's offered hand and turned his back. It was all over the Fleet in no time. It was followed by the second signalling incident on July 1st. Beresford signalled to the 3rd Division of his fleet, under Scott's command, to turn together. This would have led to a collision between the cruisers *Good Hope* and *Argyll*. With Scott's sanction the officers of the *Good Hope* disobeyed the signal, so apparently avoiding another *Victoria* disaster (1893). A bitter controversy followed. Beresford wanted to order a court-martial. The Admiralty recognized the gross impropriety of Scott's signal, but

felt that a preliminary court of inquiry would be necessary to obtain sufficient evidence to justify a court-martial. This the First Lord (McKenna) believed would be against the best interests of the Navy: it would rake up much scandalous matter and, moreover, would give the appearance that Beresford was acting from vindictive motives. Beresford was upset. 'It is difficult to believe', he wrote the Admiralty (August 27th), 'that the Board can fully understand the injury to the discipline, not only of the Channel Fleet, but of the Navy as a whole, which must result if open and flagrant disloyalty is allowed to pass . . .' Of course the incident leaked out into the press (July 7th).

At this time a sensation was created by Arthur Lee's letter in *The Times* (July 6th): '. . . it can no longer be denied that the Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet (who is presumably the Admiralissimo designate in the event of war) is not on speaking terms with the admiral commanding his cruiser squadron on the one hand, or with the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty on the other . . .' The scandal, an open secret among the well-informed early in 1908, now became a matter of general notoriety. Fisher's extraordinary patience was at the breaking point. 'Knollys', he wrote Esher on October 8th, 'dead on for my leaving Beresford alone. *It's impossible!* You can't let authority be flouted as he continually flouts the Admiralty. Daily he is doing something traitorous and mutinous.'

By the summer a number of partisans on both sides were indulging in a 'plague on both houses' line of talk, urging that only such a drastic solution as the dismissal of Fisher, Beresford, and Scott would end the personal animosities in the Navy and restore discipline. Something of the sort did come about. In August the Admiralty removed Scott to another command, and allowed him to fly his flag until February 1909, when he hauled it down for the last time. As early as January 1908 the Admiralty considered Beresford's supersession. In July McKenna tried to get Cabinet approval for the termination of Beresford's command on the absorption of his fleet into the Home Fleet early in 1909. There was 'strong objection' by the Cabinet. As Fisher had written Esher on January 24th, 1908: 'They are all "blue funkers" about Beresford and over-rate his power of mischief and his influence.' In December McKenna was successful, and on the 16th Beresford was ordered to strike his flag when the fleet reorganization in home waters took effect (March 1909). This would be a year before the expiration of the Commander-in-Chief's

normal term of three years. Beresford was bitter, as were his supporters. But, as we shall see, the pot continued to simmer merrily and boiled over in 1909, leading to Fisher's retirement.

The prologue to the last phase was the great Navy Scare of 1909. The last nail in Fisher's coffin, from the Beresfordian point of view, was the alleged Admiralty negligence in dreadnought construction that made possible that scare, which was about to hit Britain with the force of a tornado as the new year opened.

1: TO CECIL FISHER[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 23rd, 1904
3 a.m.!!!

Dearest Cis,

I couldn't come and I've been in bed for 2 days with a fearful cold, but I have worked all day just the same and am getting on famous! *Very black looks the first day!* but they are swallowing it all, and I sent all to the printer at 5 p.m. yesterday, Sunday, and roused out the manager from his Sunday nap, and, being the King's printers, were much put out, and it will all be down to-day. . . .

Your loving father,

J. F.

2: TO LADY FISHER

Travellers' Club
Pall Mall, S.W.
October 26th, 1904

Dearest Kitty,

. . . I had a splendid hour with the King yesterday. He is really most wonderfully kind to me, and we never ceased talking (or rather *I* did not!) for a whole hour, and he seemed intensely to enjoy it and kept on saying 'Bravo! Bravo! That's right! Of course you're right,' etc., etc. It really was very interesting and delightful. . . .

In violent haste, Your loving husband,

J. F.

[1] Cecil (afterwards second Baron) Fisher, the Admiral's only son.

3: TO SIR EVAN MACGREGOR[1]

October 26th, 1904

Confidential

My dear MacGregor,

Please see enclosed and pass to Lord Selborne. I have come to the conclusion that as the appointments I mention are in my opinion vital to the success of the proposals I have made, it won't do for me to serve with any other officers at the Admiralty than those I've mentioned.

Yours,

J. F.

I'm writing this at 4 a.m., so am quite calm and collected!

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 25th, 1904

Dear Lord Selborne,

No doubt you think me horribly insistent in sticking out for certain men to fill the posts which will have so important an influence in the improvements and economies we hope to effect. My contention and belief is that it's no use whatever attempting to do anything unless we have the very best men, utterly regardless of their rank or anyone's feelings or any vested interests. I am perfectly sure you put the good of the Navy far before any of these things. Also I personally should be an idiot and should only make a mess of it if I permitted myself to be associated with anyone who I knew I should not agree with or is not the best man to be got — for that reason I named to you at Portsmouth Jackson, Jellicoe, Madden and Bacon as officers to come to the Admiralty,[2] and I understand you to be favourable to them, and as you well remarked, they were '*a splendid team*'!

Similarly I am of opinion that Reginald Henderson is *the* man for the Coast Guard, and that Barry with great advantage to himself and

[1] Sir Evan MacGregor, Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, 1884-1907, and long a close friend of Fisher, who regarded him as 'the ablest Secretary of the Admiralty since Samuel Pepys' (*Memories*, p. 111).

[2] Captain (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet Sir) Henry B. Jackson, Captain John R. (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Earl) Jellicoe, Captain (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Charles E. Madden, and Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Reginald H. S. Bacon were four of the committee of 'seven brains' Fisher soon brought to the Admiralty to assist him in polishing up his projected reforms. The first three were on 'Special Service' (until the turn of the year), while Bacon served as Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord through 1905.

the Service could take Henderson's place as Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard, a post of the highest importance.[1]

One more thing I wish to name — I consider very great changes are wanted in the Dockyards, which can only be effected by a young and vigorous Director of Dockyards, aged 42, who will make a clean sweep of antediluvian processes![2] Such a man exists in the north. The Dockyards are more hopelessly wasteful than ever and want to be largely reduced and reformed, and you want a strong young man from outside to do it.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

4: TO THE EARL OF SELBORNE

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 29th, 1904

Private and Confidential
Dear Lord Selborne,

. . . *I really am sorry we did not mobilize! the excuse was so good!*[3] and I did so want to see how many of Marshal Le Bœuf's 'gaiter buttons' were missing![4] perhaps not one!

You think I'm fickle about Barry — *I am not!* I love him as much as ever! Do you know the story of Togo?[5] It's so apposite and so parallel! My friend Admiral Yamamoto[6] was asked why he had put in Togo when only a few months before he had sworn by his predecessor. He answered that reflection had convinced him that Togo was *just the least bit better!* but I have a very strong additional and vital reason connected with the shooting of the Fleet which in

[1] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Reginald F. H. Henderson did command the Coastguard and Reserves, 1905-1910, and Rear-Admiral (afterwards Sir) Henry D. Barry took over as Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard, 1905.

[2] Whomever Fisher may have had in mind, Sir James Williamson remained on as Director of Dockyards (1891-1906). His successor was not Fisher's candidate of 1904.

[3] The reference is to the Dogger Bank incident, October 22nd, 1904, when the Russian Baltic Fleet under Admiral Rozhestvensky, en route to the Far East, fired on the Hull fishing trawlers in the belief that they were Japanese torpedo-boats. The resulting Anglo-Russian crisis did not blow over until the first week in November. The matter was eventually adjusted by an international commission (February 1905).

[4] Le Bœuf was the unfortunate French Minister of War, who, on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War, assured Napoleon III that the Army was ready, even down to the buttons on the gaiters.

[5] Admiral Heihachiro (afterwards Marquess) Togo commanded the Japanese Fleet in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

[6] Admiral Gombei (afterwards Count) Yamamoto, Japanese Navy Minister, 1898-1906, later Prime Minister, 1913-1914, 1923-1924.

my opinion renders it obligatory to have Jellicoe as DNO and Percy Scott as Director of shooting![1]

I do hope the King will say something nice to the French Nation over this last business. They deserve it and would awfully like it, and His Majesty knows so exactly how to get it in!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

5: TO LADY FISHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. November 1st, 1904]

SECRET

Dearest Kitty,

I've been with the Prime Minister all day, morning and afternoon. It has very nearly been war again. *Very near indeed*, but the Russians have climbed down again. I am all right. Balfour a splendid man to work with. Only he, I, Lansdowne, and Selborne, and did the whole thing[2]. . . .

Y. l. h.[3] J. F.

6: TO THE EARL OF SELBORNE

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 6th, 1904

Dear Lord Selborne,

I have asked Dr. Burge,[4] and will make him enjoy himself, more especially as 2 submarines specially reserved for Portland will be gambolling with joy en route to Osborne at the thoughts of sinking the German Fleet in that mad rush that Bacon contemplates (all things are possible in this world!) of the Emperor William into Portland Harbour! . . .

[1] In February 1905 Jellicoe succeeded Barry as Director of Naval Ordnance (-1907), and in March Scott was appointed to the newly created post of Inspector of Target Practice (-1907).

[2] The Conservative Prime Minister, 1902-1905, was Arthur J. (afterwards first Earl) Balfour, who had more than a passing knowledge of defence problems. The Liberal statesmen John Morley and Campbell-Bannerman used to amuse themselves by declaring that Balfour was a mixture of Wellington and Nelson! The fifth Marquess of Lansdowne was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1902-1905. Fisher attributed the threat to peace to the German Emperor, William II (1888-1918), who 'is scheming all he knows to produce war between us and Russia' (Fisher to Lady Fisher, October 30th, 1904).

[3] 'Y. l. h.' stood for Your loving husband.

[4] The Rt. Rev. Hubert M. Burge, Headmaster of Winchester, 1901-1911.

Is it wise to ask the Russians for any more? Would it not be a splendid thing for an International Commission to be stultified and insulted by the non-production of the responsible persons at their enquiry? The Russian Fleet is ours whenever we like to take it. 'The Lord has delivered them into our hands!'

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

I shall be at the Admiralty at 3:15 p.m. to-morrow, Monday, rejuvenated in mind and body, to proceed with the '*Dissection of the Votes*'. We shall have fine sport! I promise you two millions! (besides the Controller's two millions!) but also (*to add zest to it!*) a bigger row than the Antivivisection Society ever produced! I suppose the Prime Minister and Austen[1] won't then refuse me my paltry pittance! I propose Bacon as Secretary of our Committee, and Nicks (a ferret in the Accountant General's Department) as Assistant Secretary.

7: FROM THE PRINCE OF WALES

York Cottage
Sandringham
November 10th, 1904

Private

My dear Sir John,

. . . yesterday I received the enclosed from our friend Hedworth.[2] I must say that I agree with him. If you remember, I told you very much the same thing on board the yacht at Cowes this summer. If you are going to remove the squadron in the Pacific because the ships are obsolete, you ought to send some new ones to take their place, at least that is my opinion. I consider that this question is much more than a naval one and that the whole thing should be carefully considered from every point of view, and that the Colonial Secretary and Prime Minister should both be consulted, and also the Foreign Secretary. But no doubt you will bring it up before the Defence Committee. Forgive me for having brought up this question, but I

[1] Austen (afterwards Sir Austen) Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1903-1905.

[2] Rear-Admiral the Hon. Sir Hedworth Lambton (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the Hon. Sir Hedworth Meux), personal friend of the Prince of Wales (afterwards King George V) and commanding the 3rd Cruiser Squadron (the Cruiser Division of the Mediterranean Fleet), 1904-1906. Fisher regarded him as a 'great friend' until the autumn of 1906, when he became a leader of the 'Syndicate of Discontent'.

feel rather strong on it, and, of course, it applies to the other squadrons you talked of removing. . . .

Believe me, most sincerely yours,

George

8: TO THE EARL OF SELBORNE

November 13th, 1904

Dear Lord Selborne,

This is a matter I felt very keenly when I went to the Mediterranean, and I have raised it several times without success. My predecessors had been Admirals, but because I was a Vice-Admiral I was docked of a number of servants, who were much wanted in the entertainment of the officers of so large a Fleet, and also docked of a large amount of pay. There ought to be a pay attached to each post, and we put the fittest man there irrespective of his rank. Personally, I should hope we might have the strength of mind to send a Rear-Admiral to command the Mediterranean Fleet if we thought him the best man, and give him the local rank of Admiral. I just write these few lines to take the responsibility of the enclosed paper,[1] and not for you to suppose that I am not a party to it!

The details of it are, of course, open to criticism.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

Approved by the Board this day. S.
6.12.04

9: TO LADY FISHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 18th, 1904

Dearest Kitty,

I saw Sir Felix Semon,[2] who was awfully kind and put all sorts of frightful things down my throat, and he says he will cure me in 24 hours! I saw him at 7 p.m., and he telephoned for some mixture

[1] From Rear-Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Marquess of Milford Haven), Director of Naval Intelligence, 1902-1905. Prince Louis, who will figure prominently in the later pages of this volume, was born in Austria, in 1854, the eldest son of Prince Alexander of Hesse. He married his cousin, Princess Victoria, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, became a naturalized British subject, and entered the Navy as a cadet in 1868. By the time of World War I, Prince Louis had a reputation as an exceedingly skilful naval commander – he was never defeated in manœuvres until 1912 – and was, in the opinion of many, the greatest naval officer of his day.

[2] Sir Felix Semon, nose and throat specialist and physician-extraordinary to King Edward VII.

and in ten minutes I had a dose, and I've hardly coughed since! It really is a wonder. I take it every 2 hours, a most delicious sort of cordial. He wanted me to dine, but I got out of that.

I've had a tremendous fight to-day and glad to say I won, but, of course, some very unpleasant quarters of an hour! However, I must expect that . . . I think this has been my hardest day. It's now 8:30 p.m., and it's the first moment since breakfast that I have ceased talking! However, all is going well, and, so far, not a check! . . .[1]

Y. l. h.

J. F.

10: TO ARNOLD WHITE[2]

Admiralty, Whitehall
Christmas Day, 1904

Private

Dear Mr. Arnold White,

This is to wish you success and happiness, and the little almanac may possibly find a home in your pocket and be the remembrance of a friend! There isn't room to write in it what much took my fancy written on the back of an old watch of the time of Louis Quatorze: '*Ceci n'est rien, l'amitié c'est tout.*'

I also send you some papers to read at your leisure. I don't want you to notice them. The time not yet ripe for the Army. Still lower depths of abysmal ineptitude have to be reached before the British Public will rise as one man and sweep away the nincompoops we class as Generals! So let it alone! The Deluge is coming along all right!

As to Nelson, I wanted to get someone to write a brochure for the centenary [of Trafalgar]! Who so able as yourself! If so, these few pages might help you, but transformed into your own inimitable language! *Nelson is not yet known!* or we should not have that old woman in the bus asking '*what those lines were a-guarding of*' in Trafalgar Square!

Please don't trouble to answer this.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] There was no let-up. 'I'm awfully busy. I've been doing 16 hours a day lately, and B. [Beatrix Fisher Neeld, his eldest daughter] will tell you it agrees with me, so far as looks go, and also I feel very well. Plenty of hard fighting going on daily, but so far I have not had a check, only black looks!' (Fisher to Lady Fisher, November 29th, 1904.)

[2] Arnold White, the naval journalist, good friend and confidant of the Admiral, who was reported to have said that he would 'sell his immortal soul' to serve him (Fisher to White, February 7th, 1906).

You were very nice in the *World's Work*, but it provoked rejoinders! I am sure obscurity is best! What a fool I was to make that Academy speech.[1] It's curious how many hundreds seemed fetched by it!

11: TO ?

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 22nd, 1905

Confidential
Dear ——,

Mr. Barnes, the greatest Editor *The Times* ever had [1817-1841], used to tell his staff that '*Repetition was the Soul of Journalism*'! What he meant was that the British Public required the same thing (if it was a good thing) continuously and persistently put before them, though in different language, till they got impregnated with it and felt it as their own, with the consequent result called 'Public Opinion'! I think my phrase is better than the Barnesian: '*Reiteration is the Secret of Conviction!*' You have only to keep on saying the same thing long enough and everyone will believe it! 'Pears' soap is the best' — at last you buy a cake of the beastly stuff!

All this is introductory to your reading the enclosed, which wants more emphasizing. Hanotaux's speech[2] was in all the French papers, so can be quoted as a recent remarkable utterance of one of the most famous men in France, and one of the 'Immortal Forty' of the French Academy!

My sole object is PEACE in doing all this! Because if you 'rub it in' both at home and abroad that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line, and intend to be 'first in' and hit your enemy in the belly and kick him when he's down and boil your prisoners in oil (*if you take any!*) and torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you. '*Si vis pacem para bellum*' is what Julius Caesar said, and it's quite true still!

I think I told you once before that a silly ass at the Hague Peace Conference, at which I was a delegate, got up and talked about the amenities of 'Civilized Warfare', and putting your prisoners' feet in hot water and giving them gruel! My reply, I regret to say, was considered totally '*unfit for publication*'!!! as if warfare *could* be '*civilized*'!

[1] Fisher's celebrated speech at the Academy Banquet, May 2nd, 1903, the first of only four public speeches he ever made.

[2] Gabriel Hanotaux, onetime French Foreign Minister (1894-1895, 1896-1898), had made some very flattering comments on the redistribution of the British Fleet in a speech of December 1904 (*The Times*, December 28th, 1904). 'Nothing to compare with it has ever been seen in history.'

These immortal words I propose to issue to the Fleet when we begin:—

'The essence of war is Violence.'
'Moderation in war is Imbecility.'
'Hit first! Hit hard! and hit ANYWHERE!'

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

P.S. I don't think you had better let anyone see this letter or I might be had up at Exeter Hall![1]

12: TO THE EARL OF SELBORNE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 26th, 1905

Dear Lord Selborne,

I wish South Africa was at the bottom of the sea![2] It is not only my very sincere regret on my personal loss, but it's also the selfish feeling that the other big things coming along will suffer! We are just in the very centre — the two next big things, the Dockyard and the Personnel, can't possibly get the weight and impetus which your prestige would have given, and they are sure to say it's *me*! Further! supposing the Government goes out, I know intuitively you would not only have helped on, but the principal people like Lord Spencer, Grey, Haldane,[3] etc., would have been immensely influenced by you! instead of which you will be on the Veldt!

There are two I earnestly wish for as your successor — either Lord Salisbury or Lord Linlithgow.[4] *I hope you will kindly try for one of them*, but anyhow do please let us have a Peer! It makes the whole difference in the Administration! Don't trouble to answer.

I really am very sorry you are leaving!

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Exeter Hall, in the Strand, London, used chiefly for meetings and demonstrations of various religious and humanitarian organizations.

[2] Selborne had just been appointed Governor of Transvaal and High Commissioner for South Africa (1905-1910).

[3] They were among the leaders of the Liberal Party – the fifth Earl Spencer, onetime First Lord of the Admiralty (1892-1895), Sir Edward Grey (afterwards first Viscount Grey of Fallodon), onetime Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1892-1895), and Richard B. (afterwards first Viscount) Haldane, one of the leading lights of the English bar.

[4] Both were members of the Balfour administration – the fourth Marquess of Salisbury as Lord Privy Seal, 1903-1905, and the first Marquess of Linlithgow as Secretary of State for Scotland, 1905.

13: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR[1]

Secret March 3rd, 1905

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I've made the further enquiries you desired (as to Long)[2] and feel fortified as to our incompatibility of temperament and views. So better not to marry than have the inevitable divorce afterwards. Therefore, to free yourself of all embarrassment, why not let me seek the pecuniary 'pastures new' which are *now* inviting me, and everyone will understand it because all know I'm a pauper. You will find all will go well here. Elisha came along all right when Elijah left in that abrupt manner! You shan't have any bother about my going. I can glide out quite naturally.

14: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS[3]

March 3rd, 1905

Secret. Please burn all this when read.

Dear Friend,

I enclose you copy of letter sent early yesterday to the Prime Minister. I may explain SECRETLY that an immense combination of the greatest shipbuilding, armour-plate, and gun-making firms in the Country are willing to unite under my presidency (and practical dictatorship!), and I fancy I should have about £20,000 a year, as I see my way to double all their dividends. *This may sound big, but it's true!* Directly peace comes, Russia and Japan will want to spend about 50 millions sterling in new ships of sorts, and I know how to get the orders, so the time is very opportune for me to slip out, and all will go well here.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

Of course the above *frightfully secret.* Sir A. Noble[4] came to see me yesterday. You can tell the King if you think His Majesty should know.[5]

[1] This is the copy of the letter enclosed with the letter to Knollys which follows.

[2] Balfour was anxious to promote Walter H. (afterwards first Viscount) Long, President of the Local Government Board since 1900, to the Admiralty *vice* Selborne. Long preferred to stay where he was and proposed the third Earl Cawdor for the post. Cawdor did succeed Selborne on March 6th, but Long ultimately became First Lord, 1919-1921.

[3] The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Knollys, private secretary to King Edward VII, 1901-1910, and 'staunch and trusty friend' of Fisher.

[4] Sir Andrew Noble, first Baronet, chairman of the great armament firm of Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co., Ltd., 1900-1915.

[5] But the King was opposed, and Fisher remained as First Sea Lord. He was rewarded with the Order of Merit in June on the King's initiative.

15: TO THE EARL OF CROMER[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 22nd, 1905

Private and Secret
Dear Lord Cromer,

You will get letters at same time as this from Sir E. Gorst[2] about dredging new passage into Alexandria, but I want to add a few words for your very own self to emphasize to you the coming importance of Alexandria in naval strategy. The Prime Minister fully concurs with me. No foreign nation has yet given a sign of realizing what the impending immense development of submarines involves. The reason is that their submarines are as yet miles behind ours (years, I ought to say!). I won't weary you with technicalities, but suffice it to say that within three or four years of this date (and you might keep this letter for curiosity!) the English Channel and the western basin of the Mediterranean will not be habitable by a Fleet or Squadron in war time. Malta will lose its significance as the base of the Mediterranean Fleet, but it will retain its importance, as absolutely locking up by means of the mass of submarines we shall station there, the passages from the western to the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. There will only be a small puddle in the middle of the western basin of the Mediterranean that will not be dominated by the French submarines on the French Algerian and Corsican coasts! Our Mediterranean Fleet, therefore, will have its new base at Alexandria, and this is as it should be, if the Suez Canal is to remain neutralized. Also, further, I personally (though yet in a minority of perhaps one) am absolutely convinced that our fighting policy is to have free access to the Black Sea for warships of all nations, and for that reason we want Alexandria, not Malta, as our chief naval base.

Time presses, as Sir E. Gorst wants this at once to go by mail this afternoon. I haven't studied my language, but it's all true.

In great haste, Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] The first Earl of Cromer, Agent and Consul-General (in effect the British Viceroy) in Egypt, 1883-1907.

[2] Sir Eldon Gorst, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1904-1907, and successor to Cromer in Egypt.

16: TO THE MARQUESS OF LANSDOWNE[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 22nd, 1905

Secret

Dear Lord Lansdowne,

Without any question whatever the Germans would like a port on the coast of Morocco, and without doubt whatever such a port possessed by them would be vitally detrimental to us from the naval point of view and ought to be made a *casus belli, unless we get Tangier*, which would perhaps (but only perhaps) be a *quid pro quo*. For this reason the Germans will ask for Mogador and Mazagan. Both are capable of being made defended ports sufficient for the purpose of holding and protecting vessels that could raid our passing commerce. The Germans know as well as we do that in war our commerce will not pass through the Mediterranean and Suez Canal to the East; it will go via the Cape, and these two ports are on the flank of this passing trade. Mogador is already a good harbour — I send you the plan; Mazagan could be made so.

This seems a golden opportunity for fighting the Germans in alliance with the French, so I earnestly hope you may be able to bring this about. Of course I don't pretend to be a diplomat, but it strikes me the German Emperor will greatly injure the splendid and increasing Anglo-French Entente if he is allowed to score now in *any way* — even if it is only getting rid of M. Delcassé.[2]

I am writing in great haste . . . All I hope is that you will send a telegram to Paris that the English and French Fleets are *one*. We could have the German Fleet, the Kiel Canal, and Schleswig-Holstein within a fortnight.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

17: TO THE MARQUESS OF LANSDOWNE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 25th, 1905

Dear Lord Lansdowne,

Thank you for your letter, and your message to Delcassé (as

[1] The occasion of this letter was the Moroccan Crisis of 1905, which had been touched off by the German Emperor's flamboyant speech at Tangier upholding the independence of Morocco (March 31st).

[2] German pressure forced the resignation of the French Foreign Minister, Théophile Delcassé, on June 6th, 1905.

approved by the Prime Minister) is splendid,[1] except that it will hold back the German Emperor before going too far and we shall be cheated out of our trip to Kiel!

Please excuse me for reverting to Rosjesventsky [*sic*]. I feel it imperative to do so in view of what the 3rd Baltic Squadron is surely going to do unless some further action is taken by us with the French Government.[2] Admiral Niebogatoff is going to call at Kamranh Harbour to coal. Not only has Rosjesventsky left some colliers there, but 6 or 8 colliers (German mostly) that were waiting Niebogatoff at Batavia were ordered on April 22 to proceed north to an unknown destination, and we worked out all possibilities here (*à la* Sherlock Holmes!) and proved conclusively that Admiral Niebogatoff is coming by the shortest route, *via* Singapore (instead of *via* Batavia), and he *must* coal *nolens volens* somewhere in the vicinity of French Cochin-China — Kamranh without doubt the best place. What I venture to urge on you is to put it to M. Delcassé what neither he nor any landsman can adequately appreciate — the intense exasperation (I know, I feel it myself, and honour the *Japanese Navy* more than ever for its self-restraint!) at seeing a neutral port undisguisedly and deliberately used time after time all the way from the Baltic to China for not only coaling, cleaning the ships' bottoms by divers (*a most important matter in Rosjesventsky's case*, as he has three faster cruisers than the Japanese! whose speed by foul bottoms would go below otherwise), filling up with provisions, running his torpedoes for exercise and to test their accuracy before use; not only doing all this but actually using the neutral port to send out his torpedo craft to examine passing vessels and get information!

All the telegraph agencies say 'Saigon has reaped a rich harvest'! *Indeed it has!* The Governor-General at Saigon securely locked the stable door after Saigon had been practically cleared out and pigs at a guinea were sold at 10 guineas! Had not the French helped the Russians the whole way from the Baltic, Rosjestvensky and Niebogatoff could not have got to China, so perhaps a few private words to M. Delcassé might prevent Niebogatoff having the great material fighting assistance given to him by the French as already given to Rosjestvensky — otherwise the Japanese may take such action as I

[1] This may be the telegram referred to on p. 58.

[2] Rear-Admiral Nebogatov, commanding the 3rd Squadron, had been dispatched from the Baltic early in March to reinforce Rozhestvensky's 2nd Squadron. He joined Rozhestvensky on May 9th off Van-Phong Bay, on the coast of Annam, then anchored in nearby Port Dayotte to take on coal and supplies and overhaul his ships. On May 14th the entire Fleet got under weigh, bound for Vladivostok. It was practically annihilated by Togo in the Straits of Tsushima, May 27th-29th, 1905.

suppose will involve us in war, for I imagine there is a limit even to their forbearance![1]

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

Togo is on the blue pencil line with his torpedo craft.

18: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Clouds
East Knoyle
April 26th, 1905

My dear Sir John,

. . . The Germans are behaving abominably, and we must do what we can to prevent them squeezing any illegitimate advantage out of the situation they have endeavoured to create.

I have, however, my private doubts as to the value of the two harbours you speak of on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Merely glancing at the chart which Lansdowne showed me, and drawing on my previous recollections, I should have imagined them very little fitted, without immense expenditure, to supply a satisfactory base of operations either for battleships or first-class cruisers; and, as regards smaller craft, hardly worth the money that would be required for breakwaters and fortifications. A large garrison also would, I should think, be required to make them safe from an expedition undertaken by any Power which had command of the sea. However, I admit that I have not looked into the question sufficiently to make even my doubts worth much consideration.

The French have been in a very difficult position in the Far East, and, in order to please their Russian allies, have stretched the laws of neutrality to the breaking point. I hope the incident will pass without any immediate trouble, so far as we are concerned, though if it ends in a maritime reverse for the Japanese, its ultimate results will be most serious. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

[1] The Admiralty was prepared to promise aid to France in the event of a German attack over Morocco, if the French would clear the Russians out of Kamranh Bay and maintain a real neutrality (Louis Mallet, Assistant Clerk at the Foreign Office, to C. I. Thomas, Assistant Secretary of the Admiralty, April 22nd (23rd?), 1905, and attached Admiralty concurrence; unpublished document in Fisher Papers). It is not clear if any such proposal was actually transmitted to Paris.

19: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. April 26th, 1905]

Private
Dear Mr. Balfour,

We got a telegram this morning giving us the position of the 3rd Russian Squadron four days ago. I've discussed it with the Hydrographer of the Navy and with the Naval Intelligence Department and directed them to draw up the enclosed report. The fact of the Russian Fleet sending their vessels out of the French harbour of Kamranh to search passing vessels, and utilizing that harbour as they are for an indefinite time to perfect their fighting arrangements, fill up with coal, clean the bottoms of their ships by divers, and presumably wait the arrival (somewhere in the vicinity) of their reinforcing Squadron, now *en route*, seems the most flagrant and outrageous breach of neutrality possible to conceive!

I suppose we have impressed all this on the French Government. Suppose the Japanese attack Roji in Kamranh Bay, as they are justified in doing. Will France fight Japan? If so, we fight France! What pickings for the German Emperor.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

It's no good France saying they have told the Russian Admiral to go and he won't! If they haven't sufficient force out there, they ought to ask us to join in fighting the Russians if they don't go.

20: TO THE MARQUESS OF LANSDOWNE

April 28th, 1905

Dear Lord Lansdowne,

I hope your telegram[1] will be effective, as the Japanese Naval

[1] To the British Ambassador at Paris, Sir Francis Bertie (afterwards first Viscount Bertie of Thame), on the morning of April 27th: 'It is clear that Japanese Government will watch more closely than ever manner in which France interprets her obligations as a neutral in Far Eastern waters. We are advised that third Russian squadron is likely during the first days of May to use Kamranh Bay or some other French anchorage for same purposes as Rojestvensky used that port with, it may be, important results on issue of impending naval struggle. Intense exasperation which repetition of these incidents would produce in Japan might have the most inconvenient results nor can we ignore effects in this country in which an outbreak of indignation was averted only by action of French Government in ordering Rojestvensky's departure. We earnestly trust that

Attaché has been here in a great state of mind — quite privately, of course.

We have made a very careful scrutiny of possibilities this morning, and I regret to say the result is to the disadvantage of the Japanese. Rojestvensky is as able as Togo. Hitherto the Russian Admirals have been nowhere. Although after a fight between Russians and Japanese the Russian Fleet would be so weakened as to enable our Fleet to deal with it as might be required, yet to be on the safe side we are sending out two more battleships as if to relieve two others due to be relieved in China, and six good destroyers as if to relieve others defective. This is all in the usual course of movements of ships, so won't attract attention.

I think the Russian Admiral, when joined by Niebogatoff (who has been sighted off Penang), will seize the Japanese Island of Bonin and there he will stop. It has an excellent and well-surveyed harbour. The Russian will have 10 battleships to the Japanese 4! but on the other hand the Japanese have a splendid preponderance of *6* armoured cruisers. The Russian wants to fight in the open and Togo don't! In the open the battleships hold the field, but in desultory fighting the armoured cruisers govern the situation. It will be a nice little game! Togo will play about and cut off colliers, etc., and Rojestvensky will intercept transports to Manchuria.

That 'Sherlock Holmes' chart I sent you is working out nicely, for Togo is where we put him, though it was distinctly telegraphed he was elsewhere. Also, Niebogatoff is keeping to his time and about May 3rd or 4th will be in touch with Rojestvensky, who is still using Kamranh Bay, so a Dutch steamer reports in a telegram received to-day. Perhaps it would be advantageous if our Ambassador could show these telegrams to M. Delcassé, as they leave no doubt as to the French ports still being in use — Kamranh and another harbour, Nha-trang, to the north. The Russian Fleet at Bonin will intercept all trade from America to Japan — a serious thing in view of submarine boats, and munitions of war and food all coming across. On the other hand the Japanese will send some worthless mercantile vessels and ram the crowd at night, as the close harbour itself will only hold a portion and the rest must be in the outer anchorage.

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instructions given by French Government have been such as to preclude possibility of any further misunderstanding. Speak in this sense but in the most friendly and considerate manner to M. Delcassé.' Bertie replied that evening: 'M. Delcassé assures me that he has not any reason to suspect that Russians intend to repeat Kamranh Bay proceedings there or elsewhere in French waters, but that he will make immediate inquiries and take measures to prevent another incident' (unpublished documents in Fisher Papers).

However, the Russians won't fail to shoot, as Rojestvensky shot his own Captain with his revolver for disobeying orders. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

The Russian will know that Togo will put down a lot of mines off Vladivostock just before he gets there, and for that reason alone he will keep away, and also the place will soon be invested! . . .

21: TO THE PRINCE OF WALES

April 28th, 1905

Sir,

In reply to Your Royal Highness's letter just received, I beg to say there is no cause for anxiety whatever as to our guns! There are weaknesses in them just as there are weaknesses even in Angels:

'In Angels faults conspicuous grow,
The smallest speck is seen in snow.'

The retired Naval Officer who is writing these articles in the 'Daily Scrap-heap'[1] was utterly useless as a sailor, so has taken to the pen and politics — the usual refuge of naval duffers! *Vide* Admiral [Edward] Field and others! He wants to get in as Radical member for Kings Lynn and is trying to 'out-Bowles' Bowles![2] A nice pair of them, Sir, in Your Royal Highness's neighbourhood! Everything always admits of improvement, and in the opinion of the experts it would be better to have the 'A' tube a little bit thicker, but as likely as not that might mean some other little objection.

The Chief of the United States Gunnery Department was here last week and stated we had the best of it in accuracy, a point which the 'Daily Scrap-heap' controverts. Also the guns can go on firing in action with the cracks and without danger. We fired a number of rounds from our 80-ton gun in the *Inflexible* with a cracked 'A' tube

[1] Lieutenant (afterwards Commander) Carlyon Bellairs. After making his mark and showing considerable promise as a young officer, he was forced by defective eyesight to retire from the Navy in 1902. Fisher at first found use for his talents, but Bellairs's articles on naval guns in the *Daily Graphic* marked a turning-point in their relations. By the end of 1906, Bellairs, now in Parliament, had emerged as a formidable opponent of Fisher and of most of his works. Bellairs was a Liberal M.P., 1906-1909, and a Conservative M.P., 1909-1910, 1915-1931.

[2] T. Gibson Bowles, Conservative M.P., 1892-1906, an authority on international and maritime law.

at the bombardment of Alexandria [1882], and also we have fired from a 43-ton gun in the *Collingwood* with the muzzle blown off, only losing about a couple of hundred feet of muzzle velocity in 2,000 feet; but it's a most unpatriotic and reprehensible thing for a respectable newspaper (*without reference to the Admiralty to verify such outrageous statements*) to publish broadcast that fifteen first-class battleships have got defective guns, implying thereby and even distinctly stating that after firing 50 rounds they would have to turn tail and flee from the enemy. This is a distinct falsehood! I imagine, Sir, the feelings of the old women of both sexes on reading this! I think Lieutenant Carlyon Bellairs, R.N., might with advantage have his name erased from the Navy List and lose the £300 a year the Admiralty are paying him for fouling his own nest! This, as Voltaire says, might 'encourage the others'!

I am, Sir, Your Royal Highness's obedient Servant,

J. A. Fisher

You will see, Sir, the Admiralty contradiction in the Naval and Military Intelligence of *The Times* [April 28th].

22: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT[1]

May 22nd, 1905

My dear Mr. Corbett,

To use a vulgar phrase, but it's so expressive! '*You're a brick*' for writing to me as you have, and please be sure I shall be only *too* delighted to profit by it. Perhaps you will come some day when convenient and give me your ideas. Don't misunderstand as to my not reading the articles or replies, but this was the reason: *I don't read attacks and think the best plan to let them alone ALWAYS!* That's why I sent the papers to you unread by me. They are not meant to be published and will not be. I will show you confidentially when you come here some big work which I think will convince you that *I have time* to deal with the big problems of strategy. You will be the more

[1] Afterwards Sir Julian Corbett. This letter was apparently prompted by Corbett's protest against the 'amateurish rubbish' that appeared in some printed (but unpublished) Admiralty critiques of public criticisms of its policy. Corbett, already emerging as England's leading naval historian, was lecturer in history at the Royal Naval War College, 1902-1914.

convinced because, strange to say, they have never been dealt with before in this office.

Some day convenient to you *after* June 1st would suit me best. *I really am obliged to you for your letter!*

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

Now don't you go and be a pessimist, please, until *after* I have seen you!

23: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
June 1st, 1905

Dear Mr. Arnold White,

I've never written a line in my life for publication, and *won't my rugged preface jar with your polished periods?*[1] But if I am to fall, I'd sooner fall in such a cause than any other and sooner serve you than anyone else! I've refused six similar requests — what am I to say to them? Not that you were '*the importunate widow*'! but rather '*the authoritative Centurion*' who has guarded us (the Navy, I mean) from the malignant malevolence of the mandarins and says to me, 'Do this, and do it!'[2]

Ever yours, in violent haste and unstudied words,

J. F.

[1] Fisher was writing an appreciation of Nelson on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Trafalgar, as a preface to a life of Nelson by Arnold White and E. Hallam Moorhouse (*Nelson and the Twentieth Century*, London, 1905).

[2] On June 19th he wrote White: 'Intensely dissatisfied with myself, but, pledged to you, I've forced myself to take my pen and write quickly that beastly preface *and now can't bear to look at it! If I send it, you will promise it shall be anonymous!* Otherwise, I think I would sooner be burnt at the stake!' In the end, on August 20th, he begged off, on the advice of a friend, who 'says every Dick, Tom, and Harry will instantly see I wrote it . . . [It is] most inadvisable for me to appear in print in any way'. However, Fisher had a few copies of his appreciation of Nelson printed privately in June. There are at least two versions, not differing substantially. One is in the Admiralty Library and among the J. A. Spender Papers in the British Museum, and the other I have had printed in the *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 1948, pp. 843-4. The former includes this paragraph (preceding the paragraph, 'But truly, Lady Hamilton . . .'): 'What fearful effeminate folly has been written of Nelson and Lady Hamilton! It was perhaps the only time he erred, and did he even then err? If he did – well, let us think of that memorable scriptural scene and ask ourselves which of us shall first cast a stone ("and they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even to the last" – was there ever a scene so wondrously depicted? But that's a sermon – not Nelson!).' Fisher's other Nelsoniana include a 'fragment', 'Nelson (A sketch by one who served under the last of Nelson's captains)', written

24: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Admiralty, Whitehall
July 28th, 1905

Dear Mr. Corbett,

I *very seldom* read anything, but I DID read your reply to Bridge, and 'chortled' with joy![1] I do so love to see a fellow properly kicked!

. . .

Yours,

J. F.

PRIVATE. With great difficulty I've got our Channel Fleet up the Baltic and cruising in North Sea. 'Our drill ground should be our battle ground.' Don't repeat that phrase, but I've taken means to have it whispered in the German Emperor's ear! The next move on the naval board will make you hold your breath when it comes! So get your heart ready for a shock!!![2]

[1] This refers to Corbett's letter in *The Times*, July 27th, on 'The Tactics of Trafalgar', winding up a debate that had been going on for some time in the correspondence columns. Corbett's evidence led to the conclusion that 'Nelson approached as in the memorandum he said he would – that is, in column of sailing and not in some other formation, as certain officers [Cyprian Bridge, in particular] jealous of his reputation have sought . . . to prove, in the face of all naval tradition and in the teeth of the signal-book'.

[2] Fisher may have been thinking of the *Dreadnought*, which was laid down in October. She was very much his particular ship. He had tremendous pride in her and boyish excitement over what was an entirely new design.

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in 1904 (see *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 318), and appreciations in *Memories*, pp. 25-7, 158-62.

The genesis of Fisher's idolization of Nelson is explained in a letter of January 21st, 1915, to Geoffrey Robinson (afterwards Geoffrey Dawson), Editor of *The Times*: 'I was the last Midshipman to enter the Navy who was nominated by the last of Nelson's Captains at the request of Lord Nelson's own niece, and I joined the *Victory*, Nelson's flagship, as my first ship, and when I last had my flag flying at the main as a full Admiral, it was on board the *Victory*, so you must not wonder I am saturated with Nelson, and these bits I enclose [the 1905 essay, presumably] I either wrote or gathered – a little garland of flowers – as a tribute, and no doubt he knows!' It seems a pity that Fisher never found time to do a full-length biography of Nelson, although he thought about it often.

This extract from a letter of Lord Redesdale (November 19th, 1908) is suggestive: 'How kind of you to send me your Nelsoniana! What you call your "lines" are an inspiration. A man as busy as you are, who can yet find time to write like that of the great hero, must be a man who feels. How can these silly fools think that a man who is inspired like that would let the Navy – the Navy of Nelson – be the shuttlecock of politicians?'

25: TO JAMES R. THURSFIELD [1]

Grand Hôtel Baglioni
Florence
October 26th, 1905

Private

My dear Thursfield,

On October 4 I began a letter to you, but a pot of jam got on it and spoiled it, and I went climbing a mountain and never went on with it! This letter (spoilt by jam!) had intended saying to you that whatever faults this present Board of Admiralty might have, yet *we could claim we know exactly what we want and mean to have it!* But the uninformed Public get led astray by writers who, if *The Times* did not give them big print (why, I never could make out! except that I was once told no Naval Officer worth his salt ever could be got to write!), these writers *who never had any weight whatever in their profession* (AND THIS A FACT!) get the ear of the Public and do the red-herring trick. So I have come to the conclusion that it would be a good thing to issue a reasoned manifesto of the past, present, and future policy of the Admiralty. The only thing against it is that I have a horror of any form of 'apologia', as we are perfectly sure of our ground and sure of success, and no opposition can thwart us, and so it's a lot of unnecessary trouble, besides being an application of the French proverb, '*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*'! I sent home about a dozen sheets—a sort of skeleton, and they say it's 'too fiery'! Anyhow, I send you these few lines with what is in my mind, and if it comes to anything, I will send you an advance copy to ruminate over! . . .

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] James (afterwards Sir James) R. Thursfield, a leader-writer on *The Times*, 1880-1923, and its Naval Correspondent from 1887 (in effect, though the title came years later) – 'a great student of naval affairs' (Fisher's note on a letter from Thursfield of July 4th, 1907). Fisher had been in Italy since October 17th, 'combining business with pleasure'. He was especially interested in seeing the arsenal at Venice, 'where there are oil-fuel experiments with torpedo boats, as in this case the Italians are ahead of us, as we are only now where I saw them 3 years ago' (Fisher to Lady Fisher, October 1st, 1905).

26: TO LORD TWEEDMOUTH[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 23rd, 1905

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

Enclosed the heads of what I ventured to mention to Mr. Haldane![2] We must pray and do our best for him to prosper and not be wrecked, as have been all his predecessors!

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

The Cardinal Points of Army Reform

I. Reduction of the Regular Army, but especially the ROYAL ENGINEERS and *Royal Artillery*, the former the most costly of anything *under the Crown*! Let Mr. Haldane ask how much the Army has been increased in ten years in numbers and cost and then ask if any increase in fighting strength! *Take off that increase!*

II. A Lord Lieutenant's Army is required to be organized — *cheap and popular and effective* to aid the nucleus of the Regular Army when war comes; but CHIEF ADVANTAGE is education of officers up to Captain's rank and *no higher*. The *Regular Army* provides the *expert officers*.

III. THE GARRISONS OF FORTRESSES. Start on a new basis in determining their garrisons! They are pure and simple for the Navy. So long as the Navy is predominant they can't be touched by anything but a raiding cruiser. If the Navy is not predominant, no fortress will avail us from making peace, *there and then!* because STARVATION comes in and compels it. But not to excite wrong emotions in the public mind, let it be said as a preliminary statement that NOW, owing to the

(*a*) unprecedented strength of our Navy at the present time,
(*b*) the collapse of Russia,
(*c*) the consequent absolute dependence upon us for its life by France,

that *now* is a time for a *pause* and a reduction in military strength, etc. (this to be amplified).

[1] The second Baron Tweedmouth had succeeded Lord Cawdor as First Lord of the Admiralty in December 1905, when a Campbell-Bannerman Liberal Government replaced the Balfour administration. Tweedmouth was Fisher's choice – a poor one, as events turned out.

[2] Haldane had become Secretary of State for War in the new Government, 1905-1912.

Lastly, can it be defended that the Army Estimates should be 29 millions and almost the same as the Navy Estimates, when our national life depends absolutely and solely on the Navy, and the Army no use without it to save the Empire from ruin?

27: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

Admiralty, Whitehall
[December 24th, 1905]

Dear Lord Knollys,

I think this print[1] will meet the King's requirements, but if not I can readily prepare something further. The whole criticism we have met is solely due to ignorance of the true facts of the case and the figures involved! I am personally accused of never looking at *the other side of things. Well, I don't! It's a waste of time*, because I have been looking at the other side for 51 years last July! and I have no need to look any more. I am going to write an *apologia pro vita sua* (after Newman!) and will shortly send you a copy!

Your words are sweet to me in regard to the Treasury.[2]

If you have the opportunity, will you kindly say to the King that the greatest compliment I can pay to Lord Tweedmouth is that I don't miss Lord Cawdor! and I have had much to do with Lord Tweedmouth already. Robertson[3] we shall manage like they do a wild elephant — the tame ones get all round him! . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

Christmas Day. Spending it at the Admiralty in answering the letters of pessimistic fossils — if it was war time we should shoot them! *Let's have war!*

[1] The print was entitled 'The Efficiency of Future Officers under the New Scheme of Training'.

[2] Pursuant to Fisher's promotion by Special Order in Council, December 4th, to be an additional Admiral of the Fleet (which gave him five more years on the active list in order to carry out his policy), the Treasury had sanctioned an increase in his half-pay from £1,222 to £2,000 a year 'as an acknowledgement to him personally of exceptional and special service, this special rate to continue to be paid to him after retirement' (Robert C. Chalmers, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, to Fisher, December 30th, 1905). In addition Fisher received as First Sea Lord £1,500 (with a furnished house) and an allowance of £365 as Principal Naval Aide-de-Camp to the King, or a total of £3,865.

[3] Edmund Robertson (afterwards first Baron Lochee), onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1892-1895), Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1905-1908. His record was that of a 'little-navy' man.

28: TO EARL CAWDOR

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 23rd, 1906

Dear Lord Cawdor,

I have been waiting to write to you till our new colleagues had pronounced themselves on the Estimates. We got them through yesterday untouched. Robertson made a struggle not to build *anything!* However, he ended by making an excellent speech (which he is going to deliver, I suppose, in the House of Commons!), giving excellent reasons for what is proposed. Lord Tweedmouth is exceedingly loyal to all your decisions and shows such a nice spirit as to make me very happy. The Civil Lord[1] I have only seen once. He seems very nice, and Robertson will, I think, be pleasant also, so all promises to be the same happy family as when you were here!

Admiral Bridge wrote a very mischievous and uncalled for letter lately, but only the *Morning Post* would insert it, saying your statement of Admiralty policy[2] was a reflection on past Boards, *which it is not.* But silence is the best weapon, as a reply, however crushing, gives them the notoriety they seek. . . .

I am storing up ammunition for you to fire away in the House of Lords, should any of these fossils get some noble Lord to speak. The last lie is that the Marines are to be abolished, when you so explicitly stated in such complimentary terms that they would be retained. I enclose a cutting out of the new Radical paper, the *Tribune*, which Lord Tweedmouth brought to me with great glee yesterday. There's a still better article in the *Naval and Military Record*, but this will suffice you, I think.

Please don't trouble to answer this.

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

I have got the extra dollars you so kindly arranged for me. Lord Tweedmouth took your paper to Mr. Asquith[3] and got it at once! I shall never forget your kindness.

[1] George (afterwards first Viscount) Lambert, Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1905-1915, a country gentleman who came to sit at the feet of Gamaliel in the person of Fisher. Lord Lambert remembers Fisher saying to him, when the Admiral was last at the Admiralty (1914-1915): 'I like you here, Lambert, because you don't know anything about the Navy, but what is better still, you know you don't know' (Lord Lambert to the writer, June 5th, 1952).

[2] Lord Cawdor's 'Statement of Admiralty Policy' (the 'Cawdor Memorandum'), published on December 4th, 1905.

[3] Herbert H. Asquith (afterwards first Earl of Oxford and Asquith), Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1905-1908.

29: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 4th, 1906

Private
My dear Friend,
. . . the *Blackwood* Balaam[1] doesn't seem dead and is trying to resuscitate the dead dog of small-powered battleships and slow speed! M. Charles Bos has for two years been the Reporter on the French Naval Estimates and has the reputation of excelling all his predecessors. I enclose what he says. *Study the italics!* I also send you some other food for babes! I know I can trust you not to show them to anyone else or to quote verbatim, and when done with, please return in the envelope I send with them.

I believe if you had stood for any English constituency, you would have romped in!

I have been informed I am going to be ruined by the Cabal of Mandarins, but I don't fear. *Secret.* I told the King yesterday that these Reforms in the Navy can no more be stopped than you can stop a glacier!

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

30: TO EARL CAWDOR

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 2nd, 1906

Secret
Dear Lord Cawdor,

There are going to be three lines of attack, I believe, by Lord Goschen and Lord Glasgow (old Brassey[2] don't count!):

[1] Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Reginald Custance, then on half-pay (that is, unemployed), who, under the transparent pseudonym of 'Barfleur' (the name of the first battleship he had commanded) had been criticizing Fisher's reforms in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Custance 'hates me like poison because I gave him a bit of my mind when I was Second Sea Lord and capsized his apple cart. He is not a sea-officer; he is only a quill-driver!' (Fisher to White, May 16th, 1905). The real cause of the feud that developed was that this 'quill-driver', a small, peppery man of reserved temperament and scholarly cast of mind, was the leader and best-informed of Fisher's critics. Thus, he was a tireless advocate of a policy of many battleships of moderate tonnage, powerful armament, and slow speed, in preference to a few very large, fast ships with relatively weak armament. This placed him in opposition to the whole dreadnought policy.

[2] The first Viscount Goschen, onetime Conservative First Lord of the Admiralty (1871-1874, 1895-1900); the seventh Earl of Glasgow, Captain, R.N. (ret.); the first Baron (afterwards first Earl) Brassey, founder and first Editor of *Brassey's Naval Annual* (1886-1890), and onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1880-1884) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty (1884-1885).

I. Against interchangeability, as laid down in your statement of Admiralty Policy. Please read Arnold-Forster's speech in *Times* of to-day,[1] which is excellent, and the two articles in *Times* which I enclose, and also the paper marked (A) which I enclose.

II. Against the *Marines* part of the scheme. Please read paper (B) enclosed.

III. Against the scheme being ineffective to produce either good sailors or good engineers. Please read paper (C) enclosed.

There may also be something said (but not likely) by Lord Glasgow against giving stokers the legitimate right to rise to be officers by being qualified to drive the engines. If so, please see paper (D). To get a general view of the scheme, please read paper (E), written by a man I never saw. There is also to be a personal attack by Lord Glasgow, I believe, *à la* Bellairs in last night's debate in House of Commons on your humble servant,[2] but that does not seem worth your notice. . . .

I regret to say Tweedmouth & Co. are getting lukewarm,[3] but I will tell you more of that when I see you. Politics seem a very warping thing when trades unions and Labour members come on the scene!

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

31: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 5th, 1906

My dear Friend,

My family are very much annoyed by the frequent allusions apparently made to my mother being a Cingalese princess or something of the sort.[4] Kindly see the enclosed [newspaper cutting], and

[1] H. O. Arnold-Forster, Conservative M.P., 1892-1909, onetime Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (1900-1903), had refuted Bellairs (see footnote 2) and defended the Selborne Scheme in the House of Commons, March 1st.

[2] Bellairs had attacked the Selborne Scheme as a 'Jack-of-all-trades scheme', charged the Admiralty with being 'simply a one-man show, with Sir John Fisher running the show', and urged a committee of inquiry on the effects of the scheme.

[3] With reference to the policy of interchangeability, which in Fisher's opinion was 'absolutely vital'. 'I am quite prepared', Tweedmouth had written Fisher on March 2nd, 'to give the new scheme as a whole a fair trial, to adopt the policy of waiting and watching, but I do think that the system of interchangeability requires special watching. I don't want to commit myself or my successors to a final and irrevocable decision before I or they have some experience to found it upon.'

[4] Fisher's enemies, in putting out the story, no doubt hoped to prove thereby that his 'Oriental wiliness' was naturally come by!

will you, if you are able, dispel the illusion. Personally, I don't care, but as my relatives don't like it, I've promised to see if it can be denied. But I don't want to appear as if being troubled about it.

I saw your kind words about me in *Daily Chronicle*. The more you throw stones at a cur, the more he yelps! I believe it's best to leave them alone. Don't trouble to answer, and don't bother about enclosed if any trouble.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[Enclosure]

Sir John Fisher's Parentage

An extraordinary story is current that Sir John Fisher's mother was a Cingalese princess. She was an Englishwoman born within the sound of Bow bells in the City of London, of which her great-uncle was Lord Mayor in 1790. He was the celebrated engraver Alderman John Boydell, and his niece and heiress Anne Philpott married Alfred Lambe, Esq. of New Bond Street, London, and their daughter Sophy married Captain William Fisher of the 78th Highlanders, who was at that time A. D. C. to Sir Robert Wilmot Horton, Bart., the Governor of Ceylon. Their eldest son is Sir John Fisher.

32: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 10th, 1906

My dear Mr. Arnold White,

This is for you to pass to Mr. Lane,[1] to beg him to let me alone till I am dead! It will be an exceedingly bad thing for me at the present time, when my enemies are 'buzzing' round me (like a hive of bees 'swarming'!), for my past deeds to be paraded! There's no interest I've not harassed and no temper I've not ruffled! And then there's envy! 'See what a rent the envious Casca made!' Seriously, it will play the mischief with me. I've often told you my métier is that of the mole! Never to be seen or heard! Only known by up-

[1] A Mr. Lane (John Lane, the publisher of the Bodley Head?), proposing to do a life of Fisher, had sounded him out through White. The Admiral's chilly reception appears to have killed the idea, which was resurrected by others only after his retirement in 1910.

heavals! Please therefore solicit Mr. Lane to forgo his intention and spare me the notoriety his kind purpose would give me. And also beg him to appreciate what 'envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness' would follow on his action.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

33: TO CAPTAIN THE HON. SEYMOUR FORTESCUE[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 14th, 1906

My dear Seymour,

Your letter was a real comfort to me. Isn't it odd how the world at large fails to look at things *as a whole*, but fixes on some little triviality and looks at it with a microscope and so magnifies it out of all proportion to its importance in the great organization of which it is only a minute and negligible portion! I've seen a fly's hind leg so magnified under a microscope as to look like that of an elephant! Such is now the case with our Naval Reforms! Distinguished Admirals and civilians are fretting about whether our future officers will have so much per cent more or less of the right engineering knowledge, and all of them lose sight of the fact that the turbine system reduces engineering complexities quite 50 per cent and the number of Engineer Officers by 50 per cent also! Similarly, they lose sight of the fact that we have now 500 Marine Officers totally unsuited to do the combatant and executive work of the ship — an encumbrance to the Service and a humiliation to themselves! and we have a hiatus of 500 officers for war purposes.

We remedy this and the cry goes up, 'The Marines are doomed'. Yet we don't touch the Marines, *only his officer*, and only touch him to improve him and his corps. The great fact of the Nucleus Crew System making OUR WHOLE FLEET efficiently ready to fight on an hour's notice (LITERALLY *one hour's notice!*) is lost sight of in the whining complaint that we sold 160 ships that were not worn out! Of course, the world is mostly fools, but it don't make the fools any more palatable.

We are absolutely on SURE ground in all we have done. Not in one single detail have we the slightest cause for misgiving! Study once more 'A Year's Work' and see what has been done!

[1] Afterwards the Hon. Sir Seymour Fortescue; Equerry-in-Waiting to King Edward VII, 1893-1910.

We have a disquieting subject ahead in a new Hague Conference. All the world will be banded against us. Our great special anti-German weapon of smashing an enemy's commerce will be wrested from us. It's so very peculiar that Providence has arranged England as a sort of huge breakwater against German commerce, which must all come either one side of the breakwater through Straits of Dover, or the other side of the breakwater the north of Scotland. It's a unique position of advantage that we possess, and such is our naval superiority that on the day of war we 'mop up' 800 German merchant steamers. Fancy the 'knock-down' blow to German trade and finance! Worth Paris! These Hague Conferences want trade and commerce and going by train de luxe to Monte Carlo all to go on just as usual, only just the Fleet to fight! ROT!!!

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

34: FROM CAPTAIN REGINALD H. BACON

H.M.S. *Irresistible*
[off Corfu]
[ca. April 12th, 1906]

Secret

Dear Sir John,

The Prince of Wales arrived here on Monday [April 9th] and, of course, we went on board to be received. He seized on me at once, and was full of the opposition he had heard of in some quarters of the Navy to the new schemes of reform and that the Navy was becoming full of cliques, which was bad, etc., etc.; that the senior officers might perhaps be more consulted and more carried with the reforms — more diplomacy, etc., etc. Evidently, from what he said, Admiral Moore, Admiral Poë, and probably the two Admirals here (Lord Charles Beresford and Admiral Lambton)[1] had been wailing and bemoaning the schemes and their exclusion from consultation. He asked if I wrote to you and whether I did not represent to you the Service feeling, etc., and, although he still professed adherence to the reforms, he evidently has been badly 'got at' by the opposition,

[1] Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur Moore, Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron, 1906-1908; Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Edmund Poë, Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Squadron, 1905-1907; Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1905-1907; Lambton was still commanding the Cruiser Division of the Mediterranean Fleet.

and they have had a full chance of airing their grievances. Well, he talked so much and, I must say, so fluently and so well, that I could with difficulty get in a word. But I told him he must remember that the Navy was ultra-conservative and hated reforms. He complained that the Admiralty only issued the arguments on their side of the question and never those against. But I pointed out that the Admiralty issued arguments on their side merely to confute those produced against the scheme, and that he need have little fear that the whole of the opposite side of the case was not put before the public by Admirals Bridge, Custance, and Fitzgerald, or that the agitators in the active service were at all shy in providing them with every argument against the scheme. He was of opinion that somehow the scheme might have been introduced with less friction. But, I pointed out, it *had to* come in; there was bound to be great opposition, and to have consulted the senior officers earlier would have meant merely starting the opposition earlier, but that I did think it would have been better to have issued a popular statement of the whole scheme to the Navy, and that I think should be done now.

Well, I went away and wrote a paper on the subject, and sent a copy to Commodore Tyrwhitt[1] and asked him to get the Prince of Wales to read it, also to get me an interview with His Royal Highness, because after a couple of days' thought more potent arguments come to the mind than when a bolt from the blue is launched at you. Well, this time was not wasted, as last night I dined on board the Royal Yacht, and after dinner the King sent for me, and after talking about submarine boats His Majesty hinted that he had heard that there was considerable opposition, and asked whether the schemes could not have perhaps been launched with less friction, saying that, of course, he knew that the Navy was ultraconservative and hated reforms. Well, I simply gave him my paper in a condensed form. I am not a courtier, never was, and never will be, but I can talk straight, which I did, on the lines of the paper, and quoted the anecdote of the naval officers turning dishonest, etc., and told His Majesty straight out that what the Navy was suffering from was want of loyalty to the Admiralty among the Admirals afloat; that any scheme they did not approve of, although their knowledge could not compare with that of the Admiralty, instead of accepting loyally, some (of course, not all) thought they were justified in throwing discipline to the winds and agitating privately against their governing

[1] Captain the Hon. Hugh Tyrwhitt, Commodore 2nd Class of the Particular Service (4th Cruiser) Squadron, 1905-1906.

body, the Admiralty. I think the King agreed to this; at all events His Majesty seemed interested and acquiesced. I think both the King and the Prince of Wales cordially approve the reforms, but the opposition admirals have been shaking their heads and grieving, and naturally the Prince of Wales has been impressed, and mentioned this to the King. This question of loyalty is of the greatest importance, and quite turns the enemy's flank. The Admiralty must govern and do what they know is right; not hunt about to allay and compromise to avoid opposition in the Navy — a weak-kneed class of governing. But the Navy must accept the superior knowledge of the Admiralty and stifle their opposition and loyally support a policy once adopted. They may, while schemes are being initiated, behave like David — clothe themselves in sackcloth and ashes, fast and pray — none of these are they likely to do literally, but the modern alternative is to become friends and correspond with Bridge, Custance, Fitzgerald, Bellairs, and Co.; but when the fiat has gone forth from the Admiralty they must rise, wash, and eat, and accept the superior ruling!

Yours very sincerely,

R. H. Bacon

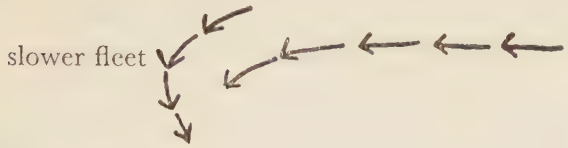
35: TO SIR ANDREW NOBLE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 14th, 1906

SECRET

I must discourage you about 20 12-inch guns at present. I suppose that never has such thought been given to fighting considerations as in designs of *Dreadnought* and *Invincible* class. Well, we are going further next year, in a quite new design, and the tendency will be to reduce the ten 12-inch guns of the *Dreadnought* to the 8 of the *Invincible*,[1] as getting the most fighting work for the money, because of absolute independence of blast, and CHIEFLY because with the 8 guns differently arranged than in *Invincible*, you will get 100 per cent of them on the broadside, and a battleship action will be a broadside action, for inevitably and surely the faster fleet will assume this formation in the crowning moment of victory.

[1] Ten 12-inch guns, later ten 13.5-inch, remained the primary armament of the dreadnoughts until the 'Queen Elizabeth' class of 1912, which mounted eight 15-inch guns.



Ever yours,

J. F.

BURN THIS.

But if you have some wonderful plan for getting 20 12-inch guns on broadside, then all right!

36: FROM CAPTAIN REGINALD H. BACON

H.M.S. *Irresistible*
April 15th, 1906

Private and Secret
Dear Sir John,

I have just had an hour with the Prince of Wales immediately before we sailed with the Fleet. We discussed the whole vexed question of Naval Training under the new scheme, and I told him all that I have written to you and a good deal more.

I think it will give great satisfaction all round if a complete description of the whole scheme is issued. I should even go further, and include all the schemes, and trace how they have turned out, putting it on the plea that much misconception has arisen as to the scope, etc., of all the reforms.

I was warned by Commodore Tyrwhitt that the Prince of Wales would not listen to the Marine portion of the scheme at all. So I tackled that straight off and assured His Royal Highness that every man who became a Colonel Commandant would have entered as a Marine specialist. The Prince of Wales ended by quite concurring in the whole scheme as regards the Marines, but made the following suggestions:

Specialisation at 20. His Royal Highness preferred 19, and thought they should first be Subalterns instead of Captains — a detail, since the time as Subalterns can always be reduced afterwards. Then, when promoted, certain very good men could be chosen to revert to Executive List again. Others remain as Marine specialists.

His Royal Highness insisted on Military uniform, titles, etc. Well!

there can be no objection to this! There will very soon be internal agitation to have Naval uniform and titles, and, perhaps, it is better that it should come from the Marines themselves hereafter. At all events, the matter is a small one compared with getting His Royal Highness's concurrence, and afterwards a compromise as to uniform and titles when embarked might be effected.

What is upsetting the King and the Prince of Wales so much is what they call a feeling of 'unrest' in the Service. Now personally I am sure this is exaggerated, but certain others do not think so.

I have tackled every single objector I know of, and the only complaints I have been able to gather against the Admiralty are:—

(1) *Want of information.*

This is specially felt by senior officers, who say that the Admiralty never give them any more information than they do the Paymaster of the ship.

If every Admiral and Captain had been supplied with a detailed account of the scheme, it would have smoothed matters considerably.

(2) *Not being consulted more by the Admiralty.*

This is, of course, entirely at the option of the Admiralty. As I pointed out, the Admiralty run the Navy, not the Admirals who command the Fleets and Squadrons. The Navy is not a Republic. This argument is, of course, unanswerable.

(3) *Captains being treated with little consideration.*

Insufficient notice of appointment, and the old custom of being offered ships instead of merely being sent being disregarded. Of this I know nothing, and it may be untrue.

(4) *Notion spread by your detractors that you override everyone else.*

In fact, that the Admiralty is run by one man. It is useless to talk to such people about the Board of Admiralty, but it is for this reason I always emphasize the Captains who have assisted in arranging the details of all the schemes of reform, and always quote the several cases when you have given up some idea you were keen on the moment a Committee you trusted reported it to be impracticable or undesirable; this is true.

You know I can talk from personal knowledge on this matter, and can give chapter and verse. The objectors can only repeat half truths, or statements which started by being half truths, but from which subsequent repetition has tended completely to eradicate all remnants of fact.

(5) *A total misconception of the education scheme, especially as regards interchangeability.*

About this the wildest statements are flying about.

I firmly believe that *au fond* most are quite happy and quite satisfied, but they like their grumble. Others really do harm chiefly by disseminating untruths. Others are born fighters and mutineers, and love to quarrel with the powers that be. Anyhow, it wants stopping, and the best way to do so would be to issue to every Captain and Admiral a copy of the Committee and Sub-Committee reports, together with a general description of the whole scheme. The latter might be made public. It wants careful writing, and the safeguards that the Admiralty have retained want indicating without emphasizing; e.g., the numbers of officers (E) who revert to the main line as Commanders should be generally dealt with so as to give good hope to those who want to return, but to ensure sufficient remaining for a time should the Admiralty require them, etc., etc.

Of course it will be a strong and yet an elastic statement.

I pressed most strongly on the Prince of Wales that the Service agitators were weakening the authority of the Admiralty with the country. The prestige of the Admiralty must be kept up and strengthened rather than diminished. I think, on the whole, the visit of the King and the Prince of Wales to Corfu has been most useful in this matter, since they have heard every objection to the reforms confuted, and also this has been the effect on their immediate entourage. The King and the Prince of Wales were always most loyal (if such a term may be used) to you personally and to the whole of the schemes of reform, but very much disturbed at the Service agitation headed by Lord Charles Beresford and Admiral Lambton.

Yours very sincerely,

R. H. Bacon

Loyalty in the Service

The best example to follow is that of King David when going through the crisis of the illness of the Bathsheba infant.

While the infant lives, i.e., while schemes are under discussion, fast and pray, and try to get them moulded to your view.

But when the infant is dead, i.e., the Admiralty scheme adopted, arise and wash your face, which is the equivalent of giving up grumbling and working loyally. The relative self-sacrifice of a Jew washing his face and the Naval Officer giving up grumbling is a matter that scoffers might see the humour of.

37: TO THE PRINCE OF WALES

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 15th, 1906

Sir,

. . . I really am looking forward very much to seeing you, Sir, because of the poisonous things being said. For instance, Hedworth Lambton gently writes to me that I am working the Press — about the grossest calumny ever propagated.

For instance, I enclose a splendid article from *Outlook* [April 14th]. I haven't the faintest idea of the authorship. Certainly no one in the Admiralty, as it has an awful error saying it would only cost £70,000 a year to give free education! There is no such fool in the Admiralty as would write that, *as it would cost half a million!*

Similarly *The Times* article I enclose, in which the main point about the Marine Officer is ENTIRELY OMITTED. No such fool in the Admiralty as to do that! We are short of about 900 combatant officers for war strength. We have over 500 Marine Officers who under present training are unable to be Executive Officers, but under the New Scheme they will largely supply our present deficiency. And is it not true that the Marine Officer, as he now exists on board, is an anachronism? The Naval Officer commands his (the Marine Officer's) men for 23 hours out of the 24! He, the Marine Officer, can't even hoist a boat up! We are trying to teach him this!

Believe me, Sir, that every single item and detail of the New Scheme has been pondered over and worried threadbare to make it perfection, and it is absolutely certain to be a success, but there must be no tinkering and no compromise. The Scheme, the whole Scheme, and nothing but the Scheme!

Bridge, Custance, FitzGerald & Co. won't go to Osborne and Dartmouth to see the actual education going on. They don't want to be converted! Beresford is writing *exactly opposite* to what he wrote two years ago.[1] It is all in print.

'X. Y. Z.,' who is Sir John Wolfe-Barry,[2] writes in *The Times*, and he knows no more about a marine engine than this sheet of paper!

[1] Beresford had written Fisher in April 1903: 'In 20 years' time Naval Officers will wonder how a steam navy could possibly have been run and administered by an executive who knew nothing whatever about steam or mechanical appliances, although every evolution, action, and duty could only be carried out by the aid of machines and skilled mechanics.'

[2] Sir John Wolfe-Barry, a well-known consulting engineer, who had built the Tower Bridge.

The British Public is on the side of the Admiralty, and our triumph is assured, because the whole business, Sir, is common sense! Do read 'A Year's Work', which I enclose, and can Your Royal Highness gainsay the virtue of a single one of the Reforms?

Believe me, Sir, Your Royal Highness's obedient Servant,

J. A. Fisher

38: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 24th, 1906

Private and Confidential

It is with extreme reluctance that I feel compelled in the interests of the Navy and the maintenance of its hitherto unquestioned discipline and loyalty to bring before the Board the unprecedented conduct of the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet in publicly reflecting on the conduct of the Admiralty and in discrediting the policy of the Board and inciting those under his command to ridicule the decisions of the Board. I need not enumerate in detail the comparatively minor cases of improperly worded letters and telegrams questioning Admiralty decisions, which in times past would certainly have led to drastic action preventing any repetition of such conduct. Nor do I dwell on the extraordinary conduct of a Commander-in-Chief 'canvassing the Captains under his command' as to whether or no they approved the policy of the Board of Admiralty, but I take one specific case, which is the culmination of all that has gone before.

The Admiralty some years ago had it brought before them that the present system of long service, owing to the large increase in the number of men, would, unless dealt with at once, result in a few years in an addition of over a million sterling to the already unduly large non-effective vote in pensions, etc., so the system of non-continuous service entry of men now in force was introduced,* and when the scheme of training these men has been perfected (which so far it has not been, and the objectors to these men never helped to improve them), I say when the scheme now in progress to improve the efficiency of these men has been in operation sufficiently long to give effect to it, we shall find these men absolutely all that could

be desired, and this has been proved by the test given us in this last year's training of these men. They have been most favourably reported on. The fact that only a portion of the crew of a ship require to be very highly trained experts is the real reason for non-continuous (or short-service) men. In a large armoured ship some 230 men are employed (or have been employed till the *Dreadnought* arrived) in transporting ammunition. It's absurd that all these men should be as expensively trained as the highly educated expert who hits the enemy $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles off ten times in ten rounds in ten minutes, as on board the battleship *Hindustan* at Lagos last week with 9.2-inch guns!

This is Lord Charles Beresford's support of the Admiralty policy in this important matter (quoted by a guest at the official dinner):

'He (Lord Charles Beresford) held forth to the assembled company in unmeasured terms of scorn on the class of short-service bluejackets, proposing to hold a review on shore for the benefit of his guests to show the "rotters" (as he termed them) their Lordships expected him to work with, etc. I alone of the entire company did not join in the general laughter and applause. When it had subsided, he turned to me across the table and asked whether I had any of these men in my squadron. I said yes and that I found them as good as the men raised in the training ships from boys. After this (to which the whole company had listened) there was a "frost" and the conversation was changed by our host. He is aware of my letter to Lord Knollys on his (Lord C. Beresford's) improper letter to the King on the subject of naval training. However, we parted the best of friends when we sailed. So much for "sincerity"!'

The above needs no comment. I don't suggest any action at present, but I think it is desirable the Board should be aware of what is going on.

Admiral of the Fleet Lord Clanwilliam spoke in the House of Lords as follows when Lord Charles Beresford, as Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet [1900-1902], commented similarly to a press representative on Admiralty policy: 'If he did consent to such publication, I think it was a very grave act of insubordination disloyal and unbecoming an officer.'

J. F.

* N.B. Long service tempered by short service. There is no intention of doing away with the long-service system, but to let the best of the short-service men go on for long service — in fact like the '*established men*' in the Dockyards!

39: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 26th, 1906

My dear Friend,

I saw Sir A. Wilson[1] yesterday and arranged with him that, after all, you shall go in *Exmouth*, because, after all, he is 'The Head Centre'. Be tender with him, as he looks on the Press as a diabolical and unmitigated evil and will be wishing to hang you all the time. But he is A-1 and worth your knowing and seeing, though he's deadly opposed to me and my views. Yet he is a fighting man and has a fighting brain.

In haste, Yours,

J. F.

What a beautiful letter you have written on Bellairs! I've just seen it. IT'S QUITE LOVELY. SECRET. Bellairs has written a most insolent private letter to Tweedmouth, and in it he attacks you as having confidential documents sent you which you quote in *Vanity Fair*. Please do not allude to this in any way, only it's as well you should know.

40: FROM JULIAN S. CORBETT[2]

3, Hans Crescent, S.W.
May 13th, 1906

Dear Sir John Fisher,

You will have no difficulty in interesting me in your scheme of extending the War College. My mouth waters already. For three

[1] Sir Arthur Wilson, afterwards third Baronet, Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, 1905-1907. When he hauled down his flag, in March 1907, he was within a few days of the age of compulsory retirement for admirals. By a special Order in Council he was promoted to Admiral of the Fleet, which gave him a further five years on the active list. As there was then no command afloat for an officer of that very high rank, Wilson spent the next two years at his home at Swaffham, in Norfolk. In April 1909 he became a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and in January 1910 he succeeded Fisher as First Sea Lord. Wilson was a great seaman with a reputation for toughness, extreme reserve ('He never says much, *but he thinks a lot!*' thought Fisher), and single-minded devotion to the Navy. He worked well with Fisher, who in 1914 described him as 'a faithful and self-effacing friend', but he was not always in sympathy with Fisher's reforms, and the two admirals did not see eye to eye in the war.

[2] Fisher had written Corbett on May 12th: 'Some day later I want to interest you in my scheme for the extension of the Naval War College at Portsmouth. I hope to fascinate you!' Fisher later noted on Corbett's letter of May 13th: 'Julian Corbett the best naval writer there is. This is written in 1906 and yet there are people writing in 1912 that Sir John Fisher did not care a d — n about a war college or educating naval officers in sea strategy.'

years I have devoted all my energies to it, and nothing, not even your combined training, seems to me to promise more for the future of the Service. Captain Slade[1] has been doing admirable work there and I am so glad to hear you are going to let him have more help. He deserves it and had got really more going than he could do.

For another and different reason I rejoice at what you tell me. It is this. Those who are in strongest and most serious opposition to you — so far as I understand them — will find, if you carry this new idea through, the main strength of their current switched off. It is your supposed neglect of what you are now devoting yourself to that is their strongest line of attack. . . .

Yours sincerely,

Julian Corbett

41: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT[2]

Admiralty, Whitehall
June 11th, 1906

Private
Dear Corbett,

. . . I have nothing but praise again for your second article, as it is precisely what is required to assist in our expansion, which I am determined to accomplish with your good aid and Slade & Co.'s proved efficiency for the business. Dear Ottley[3] is a little fearful of his Department being lowered, but I have reassured him, and you have plainly indicated that there will nothing be done to 'wrong or overshadow the well-tried Department of Intelligence'.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Afterwards Admiral Sir Edmond Slade; Captain of the War College, 1904-1907.

[2] Two Corbett articles on 'The Naval War Course' had appeared in *The Times* on June 5th and 9th. The first sketched the evolution of the War Course. The second, which prompted this letter, eloquently pleaded for the establishment at Portsmouth of a 'special campaign branch' of the War Course. It would work out the war plans of the First Sea Lord. This was stated to be an important function of a general staff to which the badly overworked Department of Naval Intelligence had not proved equal. Corbett hoped for much more than the 'expansion' to which Fisher refers and which took place with the aid of Corbett and Slade.

[3] Captain (afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir) Charles L. Ottley, Director of Naval Intelligence, 1905-1907.

42: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.
July 9th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

On reflection I think the most objectionable feature of the Treasury Memorandum (which, if not written by Sir George Clarke,[1] is inspired by him) is the suggestion it contains to transfer the responsibility of the Admiralty to the Committee of Defence in regard to the highly technical and purely professional question of comparative naval strength into which enter highly complex questions of detail, and I don't see how the Board of Admiralty could possibly acquiesce in this abdication of their functions. It's entirely another matter for the Cabinet to settle matters of high policy and give their directions to the Board of Admiralty accordingly, but the Committee of Defence is in no way constituted to settle either matters of policy or departmental questions of relative naval and military strength.

Unfortunately, every Secretary for War has brought his departmental business to the Defence Committee as the only way of subduing his departmental opposition, but you have a united Board of Admiralty who are prepared to go any length you like in your support, and I am perfectly sure they will all unite against any reference to the Committee of Imperial Defence. The sooner we send Clarke to die of yellow fever as Governor of some West Indian island, the better! . . .

Lord Cawdor told me last night there is a heavy onslaught being engineered on both sides of the House, but if you are able to state (as you can) that the Board of Admiralty is unanimous in its recommendations, there will be no real opposition from either Party — those for and those against reduction.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Sir George Clarke (afterwards first Baron Sydenham), first Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1904-1907. Fisher had been largely instrumental in securing this appointment for him; by 1906 he was regretting it. Their basic disagreement arose over Clarke's strenuous opposition to the building of the *Dreadnought*. In this instance, however, Fisher's ire was aroused by Clarke's recommendations as to what the shipbuilding programme should be – a matter wholly outside the scope of the duties of the Secretariat – particularly since his ideas differed from those of the Admiralty.

43: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
July 27th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

A minute after you left my room, Ottley brought me enclosed, which I only forward for the sake of the last four lines. It would not be Beresford's responsibility, but the Admiralty's responsibility, and he would simply obey orders. I am so glad you stated the case so clearly and definitely. The most distinguished people advise freely when they have no responsibility. The forcing of the Dardanelles is, in the first place, a military operation, as sketched out in Ottley's paper herewith, and with the altered conditions of German supervision and German handling of the Dardanelles defences, and German mines and German torpedoes, I agree with Sir John French[2] that we cannot now repeat [Admiral] Sir Geoffrey Hornby's passage of the Dardanelles [1878], and even if we get passage, there is the getting back, as [Admiral] Sir John Duckworth found to his cost [1807]. But of course a reasoned argument will be got out to satisfy the Defence Committee.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[Enclosure]

First Sea Lord

Admiralty, Whitehall
[n.d.]

Submitted:—

The question of the possibility of an attack on Egypt by a Turco-German combination was duly brought up at the C.I.D. [Committee of Imperial Defence] this morning, and Lord Tweedmouth stated (on behalf of the Admiralty) the views you have already enunciated.

Sir Edward Grey[3] and Lord Cromer strongly urged that it was a

[1] This and the following letter seemingly pertain to the serious Anglo-Turkish dispute of 1906 over the Turco-Egyptian frontier in the Sinai Peninsula, and the question of what naval pressure to put on the Sultan (Abdul Hamid II) in order to secure a favourable settlement of the dispute. In the end, a settlement was reached (October 2nd) without the need for strong action.

[2] Lieutenant-General Sir John French (afterwards Field-Marshal, first Earl of Ypres), commanding the 1st Army Corps at Aldershot, 1901-1907.

[3] Grey was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1905-1916.

matter of national importance to know whether it was possible for Britain to strike at *Constantinople*.

Lord Tweedmouth stated that (while the Admiralty did not say this was *impossible*) they insisted that the operation would be fraught with great risk and might necessitate a special vote in the Navy Estimates, if the British Fleet was to be employed to attack the Dardanelles defences.

The D.M.O.[1] then stated the stereotyped plan, which, as you remember, is to land a large expeditionary force on the north side of the Gallipoli peninsula, to take the northern Dardanelles forts in reverse, and to turn the guns on the northern shore against those on the south shore, so as to silence all the forts finally. When this is done, the fleet to appear off the town of Constantinople.

The conclusion of the C.I.D. was that the question of the possibility of forcing the Dardanelles was to be reported upon by the naval and military members after consultation between the two departments.

Lord Cromer has evidently been told by the present C.-in-C. Medn. that the passage of the Dardanelles is *not* difficult.

C. L. Ottley

44: TO FREDERICK E. G. PONSONBY[2]

Admiralty, Whitehall
August 16th, 1906

Secret

Dear Ponsonby,

When the King has leisure, I believe the enclosed would interest His Majesty. So clever a man as Lord Cromer is has lost his head

[1] Major-General (afterwards Lieutenant-General Sir) James M. Grierson, Director of Military Operations, 1904-1906.

[2] Frederick E. G. Ponsonby (afterwards first Baron Sysonby), assistant private secretary to King Edward VII, 1901-1910, and 'one of the most able and influential persons in the Empire' (Fisher to Ottley, August 29th, 1909). Fisher 'very soon realized that if he was to retain King Edward's confidence he must make friends with the King's *entourage*, and he therefore with subtle flattery proceeded to make me one of his adherents. He would write me long letters apparently intended only for me as they were so outspoken, but really for King Edward to read. Unless he marked them private, which he rarely did, I always gave them to the King to read, and King Edward delighted in reading what he imagined was not intended for his eyes' (Sir Frederick Ponsonby, first Lord Sysonby: *Recollections of Three Reigns* [London, 1951], pp. 129-30).

over this business and wants our Fleet to force the Dardanelles! *It all comes of his marrying again when he was 65!* No fellow can stand it![1]

Please burn when done with.

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

The Sultan *ought* to be, and *used* to be, our closest ally. Modern diplomacy has made him our bitterest and most powerful enemy! and handed him over to Germany! What was the use of the Crimean War and our wasted lives and money!

45: TO COMMANDER THOMAS E. CREASE[2]

Savoy Westend Hotel
Carlsbad
September 8th, 1906

Dear Crease,

When you get back to Admiralty, please see Marshall[3] with this letter and get particulars from him privately for me to use in my intended talk with all the Commanders-in-Chief and Admirals-Superintendent when I return about their ineptitude and effeteness and pessimism in dealing with defects and repairs. This is apropos of a campaign being in progress by Bellairs, H. W. Wilson,[4] and other idiots, and pandered to by Robertson, that 8 battleships were *hors de combat* lately and all the torpedo craft at Devonport (Admirals Beaumont and Barlow[5] spun this yarn to Robertson and Lambert, who wrote it privately to First Lord, who showed me the letter), Winsloe[6] having told me that practically there was nothing to interfere with the *fighting* and *seagoing* efficiency of any of them. (N. B.

[1] Further on the same: '. . . that ass Charlie B. [Beresford] is vaporizing about that it's child's play the English Fleet going past the Dardanelles, and he has impressed Cromer and some others who, of course, are not experts and take Charlie B. at his own valuation. I think Cromer going off myself. I had two long talks with him. If you marry at 65 and keep on having babies, you can't keep on having your brains! Thucydides said that, if you remember!' (Fisher to Esher, August 19th, 1906).

[2] Commander (afterwards Captain) Thomas E. Crease, at the Admiralty as secretary to various committees and for 'Special Service', 1905-1910.

[3] James (afterwards Sir James) B. Marshall, Director of Dockyards, 1906-1917.

[4] H. W. Wilson, chief leader-writer of the *Daily Mail*, 1898-1938, and a leading naval journalist. He was generally hostile to Fisher's reforms.

[5] Vice-Admiral Sir Lewis Beaumont, Commander-in-Chief at Devonport, 1905-1908; Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Charles J. Barlow, Admiral-Superintendent of Devonport dockyard, 1906-1908.

[6] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Alfred L. Winsloe, commanding Torpedo and Submarine Craft Flotillas Afloat and in Reserve, 1904-1906.

Because a pump handle is twisted, that doesn't interfere with *fighting* and *seagoing* efficiency.) Also loads of these defects had no business to have existed — they ought to have been nipped in the bud by the artificers of the Fleet — similarly the big vessels — things all exaggerated. The vessels are sent for repairs because they can be spared for the purpose, but if it were WAR TIME, *not one of those vessels but could have been at sea with the Fleet.* THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO RUB IN. You can write *privately* to Marshall at once and enclose this letter. I don't want Controller[1] to be worried, as he is very sensitive. I can manage the Admirals!

Yours,

J. F.

46: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Carlsbad
September 10th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

I took the same sort of oath as Jeptha's to murder anyone who caused me to write while away from the Admiralty, but the enclosed sheet from Drury[2] precludes me from making him 'a burnt offering,' as the two points are so vital!

Pollen's invention[3] *is simply priceless*, and I do hope we may hesitate at nothing to get ITS SOLE USE. We shall NEVER be forgiven hereafter if we do not! Jellicoe's arguments are so cogent and convincing that it's useless my enlarging on them!

As to the wireless there is equal reason to be ABSOLUTELY UNCOMPROMISING, and the Post Office *must* yield to us if we are firm.[4] The

[1] Captain (shortly to become Rear-Admiral Sir) Henry B. Jackson was Third Sea Lord and Controller, 1905-1908. 'Such a Controller is a *rara avis*' (Fisher to Tweedmouth, October 5th, 1906).

[2] Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Charles Drury, Second Sea Lord, 1903-1907.

[3] Arthur H. Pollen, naval journalist and inventor, had in 1901 devised an apparatus called the Argo Clock for plotting the course and speed of an enemy ship. Pollen's gadget was adopted by the Admiralty.

[4] This is apropos of the International Wireless Telegraphy Conference in Berlin, which revealed an open divergence of views between the Admiralty and the Post Office. On November 3rd, 1906, the twenty-six powers represented in Berlin signed a convention. Its most important provision was that the contracting states undertake to make arrangements for wireless telegraphy communication between their coast stations (excepting naval and military stations) and vessels of all nationalities, whatever system of wireless telegraphy these vessels might employ. The convention served the interests of British imperial security, since the Admiralty could never afford to maintain in peace all the stations it would require in time of war.

simple fact that the German Emperor is moving heaven and earth (so I heard privately at Marienbad, as part of the secret conclave that took place at Homburg) against the Admiralty view should be enough of itself to convince us that we should put our back against the wall on this matter. The Post Office know nothing, and the Foreign Office less, as to our fighting necessities.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

47: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Carlsbad
September 14th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

Your letter just came. I have carefully considered it and, though I *detest* compromises, I see that the wording as arranged safeguards us to the utmost extent practicable in view of Post Office and the former correspondence you quote.

I am specially obliged to you about Pollen. The case is marvellously like the introduction of the Whitehead torpedo [1866]. We could have had the absolute monopoly of that wonderful weapon (and Mr. Whitehead body and soul into the bargain!), but the Admiralty of that day haggled over £80,000. But thanks to you, I hope we shan't make such an idiotic mistake over Pollen!

I have had sent me a very instructive extract from a paper by the celebrated French naval architect Le Bœuf: 'The Navy which has the boldness to lay down warships of 25,000 tons — *and there is no technical reason to prevent this* — will at once outstrip her rivals.' And he adds with gospel truth, which we worked out as a definite conclusion on the Committee of Designs: 'In my opinion it would be better to have four powerful ironclads costing £2,600,000 each, than six mediocre ironclads at £2,000,000 each. *There would be more actual power with less expenditure.*' I am going to get the whole paper translated for you, together with some other lovely facts which will shut up Maxse[1] in the *National Review*, *et hoc genus omne*.

Also I am collecting some facts which will come in very handy to demolish the pessimists and 'washing-dirty-clothes-in-public-ists,' who want to make out, and have already frightened Robertson, that

[1] L. J. Maxse, proprietor and Editor of the *National Review*, 1893-1929, possibly the most relentless of Fisher's critics.

the repairs of vessels in commission and reserve are neglected, when as a matter fact the direct opposite is capable of mathematical contradiction. The principal people to blame are 'our own household' (another proof [of] the authenticity of the Bible that 'a man's foes are those of his own household'!). I propose and have arranged to have a meeting of all the Commanders-in-Chief and Admirals-Superintendent at Admiralty on my return, when in a most conciliatory and amiable manner I propose to explain to them how they have failed in certain typical cases at each port to make good defects as they arose, and how they have exaggerated totally immaterial defects. Does a twisted pump handle interfere with a ship's seagoing and fighting efficiency? But I won't trouble you with more of this — and from the dramatic point of view it's rather good policy on our part to let all these people have a clear run and give them plenty of rope, and then smash them up by a speech from you in the House of Lords or from the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, referring more especially to the silly outcry that we are sacrificing our naval supremacy by dropping one Dreadnought.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

48: TO COMMANDER THOMAS E. CREASE

Grand Hotel Neues Kurhaus
Levico [South Tyrol]
September 26th, 1906

Dear Crease,

Many thanks for your letter, and please thank Marshall very much for his help, when I know he is very busy through Controller's illness. PRIVATE. It's rather a good thing the Controller being ill (only I love him too much not to be very sorry), but I shall have a freer hand with these Commanders-in-Chief and Admirals-Superintendent at the meeting on November 8. The pith of my remarks will be:

'DISCRIMINATION.'

They all go at defects like a bull at a gate! They must be sorted out both by ships and items — the ship *most* wanted put right first, and ONLY THOSE DEFECTS ATTENDED TO AT FIRST WHICH INTERFERE WITH FIGHTING AND SEAGOING EFFICIENCY, and DRASTIC DEALING with all officers from TOP to bottom who don't follow the principle of a 'stitch

in time' and allow defects to become serious instead of taking them in the early stages with the ship's artificers.

Remember to remind me to put before them that human nature says to everyone on board, 'Our only chance now of getting a spell at home is to have engine-room defects — we get so bustled about and so much at sea, it's our only hope of a holiday!'

I want to get as complete a statement as you can. It's simply scandalous with the enormous number of Dockyard workmen we have here that there should be any delay in fighting or seagoing defects. *If necessary we must put back the shipbuilding in the Yards.* The PRIMARY duty of a Dockyard is REPAIRS, not BUILDING.

Yours,

J. F.

49: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Levico
September 26th, 1906

Secret and Private

'Party,' as usual, has come before 'Patriotism,' and I have it on undoubted authority that a skilfully organized 'Fleet Street' conspiracy is endeavouring to excite the British Public to believe *three* things:—

I. British naval supremacy is endangered by the Admiralty shipbuilding policy.

II. The repairs of ships are so in arrear that the fighting efficiency of the Fleet is being sacrificed.

III. That the present damnable and effete First Sea Lord must be got rid of.

Well, in regard to I and II, I've given certain leading facts and statements upon which to found a complete answer, based on considerations which I will briefly enumerate presently, and I propose that at the psychological moment a public statement should be made, and cause the earth to open and swallow up Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and all their company, who are represented by the *National Review*, the *Daily Mail*, and that pestilent young ass who represents King's Lynn [Bellairs]. A calm and studied statement verified by accompanying facts can prove two things:—

(*a*) In dropping the one Dreadnought this year we are only doing what has been done in the preceding two years (and *more*

also) by the late Government. That is to say, the foreign shipbuilding not having made the advances stated in foreign official statements, we were not justified in spending the money for the sole reason that Parliament had generously voted it.

(*b*) Also, our curtailed shipbuilding policy is so enormously in advance of our requirements (*at present*) that it's simply stupid to talk of the loss of our naval supremacy.

1 Dreadnought built;
3 to be laid down this year;
3 next year (because the Hague Conference will be futile);
3 'Invincibles' building, which vessels (*in my opinion*) *superior* to Dreadnoughts.

—

10 Dreadnoughts practically built or building in two years!!!

What is there to touch this in foreign shipbuilding programmes?

Again (*and this requires to be most prominently and emphatically reiterated, ad nauseam*): 'The consistent policy of the Board of Admiralty since October 21, 1904, is to have a *yearly* programme only. "*Sufficient unto the year is the shipbuilding thereof.*" ' We are not going to be frightened by foreign 'paper programmes' (the bogey of agitators!). But when foreigners, and especially Germans, actually build, *then* we will double!! But no houses of cards for us! Our present margin of superiority over Germany (*our only possible foe for years*) is so great as to render it absurd in the extreme to talk of anything endangering our naval supremacy, *even if we stopped all shipbuilding altogether!!!*

Then as to repairs: I've written fully about this. There has been, I fear, scandalous silliness about defects and repairs. *We must alter all this!* I propose a lecture on October 31st to all the Commanders-in-Chief and Admirals-Superintendent, whom I am going to have at Admiralty for an amiable and conciliatory setting forth of their d—d *stupidity*, *pessimism*, and *effeteness*, of which I have full and authenticated particulars, and which I shall read out to them and rub their noses in it! Instead of the defects being undertaken to *suit* the Dockyard (as at present!), I am going in the future to take the matter in hand myself, and the First Sea Lord will state *the order* in which he wants *ships* and *items* taken in hand. However, that doesn't deal with 'the present distress,' as St. Paul would say! What I want to prove is — *and it can be proved* (because as you know you can always

arrange facts to prove anything!!!) — that the fighting and seagoing efficiency of the Fleet in no one single instance in any one single vessel has been jeopardized by any hanging back of repairs, etc. For instance, as I had occasion to point out in reference to certain d—d old women at Devonport, '*Does a twisted pump handle prevent a ship fighting efficiently or going to sea safely?*' To this subject we must give special care, as people are apt to lose themselves in microscopic details.

Here is another point to be emphasized. Germany is our only possible foe for years to come! For years and years to come it is simply impossible for Germany to cope with us singlehanded, and she has no naval ally. Neither Austria or Italy would join her against us, and France is simply out of the question, and Japan is the most dreaded menace to Germany and Kiaou-Chaou, and all the immense German mercantile and shipping interests in the Far East — all would be absolutely annihilated by Japan in concert with England, and the undoubted vast strides of German mercantile influence in the Yangtse and elsewhere would fade away like the baseless fabric of a vision, and the Emperor of Germany has lately said to a friend of mine that it is literally simply hopeless for Germany to attempt anything against England for years and years to come, and then only in association, as he hopes (but his hope will *never* be fulfilled), with the United States!

This being the case, as affecting the question of repairs of ships, we have such an ample margin of strength that we can afford to let our vessels wait for repair. *But why so?* will be the question. *Because* it is vital that we should preserve our *normal* numbers of Dockyard workmen and not go having spasmodic entries (such as recently) of batches of Dockyard workmen to cope with some *fancied* pressing want of ships having defects. These men once entered *never* get discharged — the Parliamentary and Trades Union and Labour influences are always too great, and these entries of Dockyard men *directly* reduce the Fighting Fleet! It can be proved that the recent new entries of 150 Dockyard workmen at Devonport, the retention of the 200 men at Chatham Dockyard, and the extra wages of £23,000 at Sheerness, and the halt made in the decrease of Pembroke Dockyard, mean the cost of the upkeep *of at least 3 cruisers!* Not only so, but it is simply ruinous to the private shipbuilding trade of this country to reduce the work that can be given to them by swollen numbers of workmen at Government Dockyards. Therefore the *normal* number of Dockyard workmen should never be exceeded,

and the ships must wait as necessary, observing that in almost every instance the defects and repairs do not interfere with the vessels in question being capable of fighting an action. I have written the most violent letters lately to Controller, etc., on this subject of recent entry of Dockyard workmen, as no one but myself and poor Gordon Miller (late Accountant-General, now dead and gone!) can have any idea of the odium and the difficulties encountered by our Committee on Dockyards (even in Bishops joining in the clamour when they ought to have been looking after their own discreditable disorganization; however, thank God, the Church will soon be disestablished and we shall have Free Trade in Religion!) in the unprecedented discharge of 6,000 Dockyard workmen, and the splendid thing about it all is that there has been practically no real distress and no great hardship as in the time of the great Childers reduction of Dockyard workmen,[1] which was only half of our present reduction — *and why?* Because never in their history have all the Dockyard towns, except Pembroke, known such amazing prosperity as they now experience because of the Nucleus Crew System, which causes the money and upkeep of 150 vessels (more or less) brought home from foreign stations or got rid of now being concentrated in the Home Ports, and money from them flows like water into the Dockyard towns instead of being spent abroad in foreign countries.

50: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Levico
October 4th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,
Your letter this moment come:—

I. — *Distribution of the Fleet*

Foreign and Colonial Office requests: — I don't think there is anything pressing on this which cannot wait till I see you. I have it all at my fingers' ends, and trust to convince you and also Sir E. Grey and Lord Elgin[2] that their subordinates quite unduly magnify any want of Admiralty attention to their requests, but we cannot

[1] Hugh C. E. Childers, as First Lord of the Admiralty, 1868-1871, had effected economies in dockyard administration through such measures as a reduction in the dockyard labour force.

[2] The ninth Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1905-1908.

possibly get the Navy Estimates down to the figure which I think the House of Commons will insist upon sooner or later, unless we strictly confine our naval expenditure to *absolutely necessary services*, and it can be incontestably proved that any reasonable requirement of the Foreign Office or the Colonial Office has never yet been resisted by the Admiralty. Just by way of example, let me mention the second *stationnaire* [guard-ship] at Constantinople, which was made a *casus belli* by the Ambassador at Constantinople, by Sir T. Sanderson, and by Lord Lansdowne.[1] The Admiralty said *non possumus*, and here we have it not long ago from Sir E. Grey that we were right. That saved *£15,000* a year, in the upkeep of a useless vessel for fighting purposes, but much more — it saved the deterioration of a fighting ship's crew. As to the Colonial Office, a still stronger case exists. By way of an example, when Mr. Lyttelton[2] wanted the Admiralty to practically make war on Uruguay by sending vessels of war there to take by violence a Canadian schooner that had been stealing seals! On that occasion I was had up before the Cabinet, and the only sensible men were the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor,[3] and again the Admiralty *non possumus* was justified! But all this is only to ask you to wait my return before taking any action. . . .

III. — *Paying off Vessels into the Reserve*

This subject, as you will remember, was most exhaustively gone into by the Sea Lords, and we unanimously came to the conclusion to state to you that there was no justification for keeping such an immense Naval Force in full service at sea as at present, *i.e.*, the present Naval Force at sea is greater in power than at the time of the Dogger Bank incident, when it was possible for France and Russia to have thrown in their lot against us, and we considered our naval

[1] Sir Nicolas O'Conor, Ambassador at Constantinople, 1898-1906; Sir Thomas Sanderson (first Baron Sanderson, December 1905), Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1894-1906. In view of persistent rumours of impending outrages and massacres at Constantinople, the Foreign Office had, on October 2nd, 1905, asked the Admiralty to replace the second *stationnaire*, which had been withdrawn in the previous autumn, with a ship of 800 to 1,000 tons. It was said to be needed for protective purposes in case of a sudden emergency, and because British naval representation in those waters should not be inferior to that of other great powers. The Admiralty's reply (November 30th) stated that, in view of the political, naval, and financial considerations involved, alternative measures should be considered, especially since it was contrary to their policy to maintain in commission small, out-of-date, and poorly armed vessels of the type in question which would be useless for the object in view.

[2] Alfred Lyttelton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1903-1905.

[3] The first Earl of Halsbury, Lord Chancellor, 1895-1905.

strength *then* amply sufficient. Now Russia is annihilated, France our friend, and Germany our only possible foe, many times weaker than ourselves; so how can we support or justify keeping up our strength at sea at a higher pitch than then? *But not only this* — the nucleus crews are by this new arrangement increased in strength, and more vessels ready in home waters against our only possible foe — Germany. *It's a vital necessity* to carry out this arrangement.

Of course economy must never be allowed to clash with fighting efficiency — in this case it does not! IT INCREASES IT! and by no other means can we reduce the Navy Estimates as promised at 10, Downing Street, and as arranged for — and the papers have all gone out confidentially to the Commanders-in-Chief with your approval. We should indeed look very foolish if we faltered in this step, which means efficiency as well as economy. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

51: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Levico
October 5th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

Your second letter from Balmoral has just reached me, and I can only say that when you told His Majesty that nothing rash had ever been done or was contemplated, and that the case for Admiralty policy was unanswerably strong and only a continuity of that pursued since October 21st, 1904, *you were stating to His Majesty the exact and literal truth!* When Lord Selborne informed me on May 14th, 1904, that the King had been pleased to approve my appointment as First Sea Lord, I had a long interview with Lord Selborne (as Lord Knollys is aware — for I had serious doubts as to the acceptance of the post, and consulted him before seeing Lord Selborne), and I put before him every single one of the Reforms that have already been carried out, those still in progress, and those yet to come, and I told Lord Selborne and Lord Knollys that all these Reforms were based on years of careful consideration and discussion with the best brains of the Service. I am writing all this at this length so as to disabuse the King, when next you may have the opportunity of waiting on His Majesty, that the vulgar error has even a grain of truth in it that the Reforms introduced during the last two years are

in any way piecemeal or haphazard. *On the contrary*, EVERY SINGLE ITEM IS PART OF ONE HARMONIOUS WHOLE! . . . in accordance with custom I know you will be sure to send the King the full and detailed account he wishes for, as regards the nucleus crews and any readjustment in the strength of our Squadrons.

The time is not yet ripe for this. We sent very confidentially to the Commanders-in-Chief what the Board had in view, and invited them to offer any remarks before we issued the final orders officially and publicly, and evidently some of these officers have broken faith with the Admiralty, and have been writing privately to the King or those who have told His Majesty, as mentioned in your last letter, or else those officers are writing entirely in the dark as to what is being arranged for.

As I ventured to put it to Lord Cawdor on a similar occasion of fright, is it likely, with such a Board of Admiralty as we have, that any steps would be suggested that would imperil our naval strength, and for ever ruin our reputations? Every conceivable motive exists for the Sea Lords to go in for big Estimates, and it has been a strange feature (AS SIR EVAN MACGREGOR WILL VERIFY TO YOU) that the political and civil pressure has been against economy in the Estimates, and Lord Selborne wouldn't take the saving that was prepared for him, and afterwards we had to press for the reduction that was made in the following year also. But I consider we should be grossly guilty if we spend one farthing more than necessary, and I am certain you share this view. I am busy preparing the various notes that will be of service to you in meeting any and every possible criticism . . . A very well-informed friend writes to me (and it is confirmed from other sources) that public opinion utterly repudiates any want of confidence in the Admiralty.

I see Mahan has been trotted out by *The Times*,[1] but as a Yankee officer told me lately, he is *passé*, and has become a second Brassey

[1] *The Times* of October 1st, 1906, published extracts from Mahan's article, 'The Battle of the Japan Sea' (*Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*, June 1906). The section that most disturbed Fisher reads: 'The ever-increasing size and startling cost of the battleship brings us also face to face with the opposing considerations of numbers and reduction of expense. Budgets not being illimitable in size, there results between numbers and individual cost of ship an opposition, in the adjustment of which, as in that between speed and offensive power, there should be no compromise. The superior claim of the one or the other should be admitted, and, when admitted, enforced in practice. A nation with naval responsibilities must have numbers in proportion; and this consideration is greatly reinforced by another advanced before this war and confirmed by it, that naval war henceforth will be marked by greater losses of material than of *personnel*; that reserves of ships will be more needed than reserves of men. The exigency of renewing coal-supply works in the same direction . . . The bigger and fewer the ships, the greater the proportionate loss when one goes into port.'

and equally a bore! The advocates of small battleships and low speed have been so often pulverized (and never so effectually as by the French Admiral Gervais) that it's wonderful how they can ever get anyone to print such nonsense.

Personally, I am absolutely delighted with and revel in hostile criticism. I know nothing more intensely gratifying than placarding your enemy as a fool, which all the present criticism so easily admits of! Forgive me for troubling you with so much.

Our position in every little particular is magnificently splendid.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

52: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Levico
[early October 1906]

Secret and Private

Dear Arnold White,

In the strictest confidence, for your private eye, I enclose copy of report from our invaluable and trustworthy Naval Attaché at Berlin,[1] so that you may be confirmed in your views; and may I beg you to read the first two columns on the front page of the *Naval and Military Record* of October 4 (*so concise and clear as to be worthy of your pen*). But whoever wrote them deserves well of his countrymen, and the four points should be reiterated all over the country.[2]

Did you invent the name of the 'Blue Funk School' for those who oppose the 'Blue Water School'? *It's splendid!* Read Sir Charles Dilke[3] (than whom no one knows more about the British Army) on Thursday, September 27, at Coleford, Forest of Dean, when he gave the cost of the Army in this present period of profound peace at £60,000,000 a year, and next year the Navy Estimates will be at

[1] Captain (afterwards Admiral) Philip W. Dumas, Naval Attaché to Germany, Denmark, and Holland, at Berlin, 1906-1908.

[2] The four points recapitulated 'the main facts which the agitators will not remember': Not a single battleship had been laid down by any European power in the past twelve months; in the same period England had built the *Dreadnought* and had laid down three 'Invincibles', which were 'practically Dreadnoughts'; the Navy was preparing to lay down three more dreadnoughts; there was no foundation for the stories that the Germans were building larger and more powerful dreadnoughts.

[3] Sir Charles Dilke, second Baronet, an independent Liberal M.P., 1868-1886, 1892-1911, who had for many years been preaching Blue-Water theory in Parliament with missionary fervour.

£29,000,000, with a fighting efficiency that makes us say, 'Let 'em all come!' Was there ever anything so grotesquely absurd as this comparison of Army and Navy expenditure? And yet the 'Blue Funk School' want to spend more money on soldiers! in the ridiculous delusion, fostered by military quill-drivers, who predominate in the Press, that invasion is possible!

God bless you. Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

53: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Levico
October 11th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

I think I had better anticipate by a few lines now what I am going to explain in detail when we meet, in order to remove any impression that may possibly exist in your mind that the rearrangement of the strength of our various Squadrons, which we discussed and agreed upon before the official letters were sent to the various Commanders-in-Chief, in any degree implies any diminution in our fighting strength. ON THE VERY CONTRARY, *I don't know anything that we have done which will more add to our fighting efficiency!* and this is the main reason: that by this new rearrangement, whereby 7 battleships and 4 armoured cruisers are brought home, we are able to constitute a fresh '*Home Fleet*' (as I should like to term it), and by a reorganization which this addition of 11 powerful armoured ships admits of as regards our present Reserve Divisions, and placing them all under one Admiral whom I have in mind to suggest to you as *par excellence* fitted for it (*and it so happens all the circumstances peculiarly lend themselves to this project*), we get a homogeneous perfectly constituted *Reserve Fleet* always in 'Home Waters', working under the supreme command of one Admiral, and I hope you will see when this Fleet goes out for manœuvres next summer in the manner I propose to suggest to you — that everyone will see — what another great stride forward we have taken in our strategic policy of collecting our fighting strength in the place we want to fight.

Intimately associated with this project, and indeed the very basis of it, is the great fact that for years to come, *Dover*, *the Nore*, and the *North Sea* are our *points d'appui*, and you will see when I explain the

details (too intricate for a letter) how everything fits into our purpose.

I here put aside, as quite subsidiary to this main fighting question, the political and financial considerations which attend it — those will perhaps be the considerations that will weigh most with most people, for both politically and financially (as I also will hereafter explain to you) no two opinions can be held as to the wisdom of the course we are going to pursue. I am not sure we shall not save a quarter of a million a year.

The silly cry (which I am assured on most excellent authority has fallen perfectly flat on the Country) that the fighting efficiency of the Navy is being reduced and our naval supremacy impaired will be met in the most conclusive manner by the British Public seeing a new Fleet emerge into being, complete in all its parts, instead of the present disconnected and organically incomplete Reserve Divisions, which we have not sooner formed up simply because the time was not ripe, nor had the psychological moment arrived for the New Dispensation to be brought forward.

However, all this I hope to make so transparently obvious to you that I have not the very faintest doubt but what you will cordially approve the whole arrangement *in toto!* . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

54: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Levico
October 12th, 1906

Secret

Dear Arnold White,

Carry the 'Fiery Cross' through the British Empire! *Times*, October 9, page 5, last paragraph of column 2, as your message.[1] I gave those words (this is PRIVATE) to my colleagues on the Com-

[1] The paragraph in question was the quotation in a letter by 'Navalis' (Sir George Clarke), enclosed by Fisher, of this 'pregnant passage in a very recent book on "Imperial Strategy" ': 'Buttonhole one of those old gentlemen in Pall Mall; stop them and ask them why they ask us to pay for 640,000 men, mostly organized to do nothing at home; ask them when last England was invaded and why; ask them when last a British battery on the coast line fired a shot in anger; ask them when a fort in the interior of England or Scotland was ever of service to man or beast. Ask them, and they will not tell you because they do not know, and neither does any one else.'

mittee of Three,[1] and it has since been thrown into a pamphlet by Esher for secret use of Cabinet and others, but don't mention this or my name. (*Remember the mole!*) (N. B. The other day, Haldane said a great authority in the Army said he would never succeed unless he adopted the 3 R's. He must be Ruthless, Relentless, and Remorseless.) I am the humble author and he is *not* following the advice. He is my friend and I want him supported by public pressure, so quote Dilke and ***60*** (sixty) millions on the Army as compared with 29 millions on the Navy next year, with the motto of fighting efficiency and instant readiness for battle. 'Let 'em all come.'

I am just now in the midst of another revolution, of which you will hear somewhat later on. Another Minerva will shortly emerge from the head of Jupiter!

Don't unwittingly betray me, but we want to get the Army Estimates down to 20 millions and the income tax at threepence in the pound, and Arnold White & Co., if they will savagely go to work and rise, the Country will do it and the First Sea Lord can be a potent power, but he must be supported against the blatant asses that bray so loud — '*vox et praeterea nihil*'!

Imagine the state of the public mind when as much credence is given to old Brassey in big print in *The Times* [September 25th] about small battleships (see his recent letter), as if he had all the studied knowledge of the First Sea Lord! and also consider what we have come to when a pestilent young jackanapes like Bellairs is lauded by the *National Review* and *Daily Mail* as doing the State a great service by his bespatting the Sea Lords with the mud of ineptitude! '*J'y suis, j'y reste.*'[2] I'm not going to be turned out, though they say they have hopes!

Yours in a great hurry, for all this I have written to you is extraneous of the big things I have in my mind. Take care of yourself.

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

[1] The War Office Reconstitution Committee (the 'Esher Committee'), 1903-1904. Clarke was the third member. The second Viscount Esher figures prominently in Fisher's correspondence. He was one of the most remarkable men of the time. Not caring for the responsibility of high office (he declined both the Viceroyalty of India and the Secretaryship for War), he contented himself with the posts of Secretary to H.M. Office of Works (1895-1902) and, from 1905, permanent member of the Committee of Imperial Defence. But as the unofficial liaison between King Edward and ministers, he was extremely influential behind the scenes and knew everything that was happening in the political world. Fisher and Esher had hit it off beautifully since their first meeting in 1903. Through Esher Fisher was *au courant* with high politics, as suggested by this extract: 'I have no scandal for you, as Esher in the dumps' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, June 8th, 1910).

[2] 'Here I am, here I stay', General (afterwards Marshal) MacMahon's reply to those who urged him to abandon the Malakoff Tower after it had been captured by the French troops in September 1855 (the Crimean War).

55: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Levico
October 16th, 1906

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . [The *Dreadnought*] certainly has been a *phenomenal* success, and perhaps in nothing more than in her marvellous handiness. As Bacon well put it, he imagined himself back in a torpedo boat![1] I suppose the 'Syndicate of Discontent' will say the Admiralty as usual is having the Devil's luck! The rejoinder is that the Devil's invariable good luck is consequent on his unfailing attention to every petty detail in order to gain his object!

I enclose for your private eye a letter from Captain Cradock,[2] one of our very best officers. You must some day let me tell you the story of his being the real hero of [Vice-Admiral] Sir E. Seymour's abortive expedition to relieve Pekin [1900]. I send Cradock's letter so that you may see it is not 'all jam' about [A. K.] Wilson! It's a great failing in him that he never can evoke enthusiasm and is well named ' 'ard 'eart' by the men! . . .

I only have one thing much on my mind, and that is the development of the War College at Portsmouth, which is a pressing matter — *a very pressing matter*, but I am going to talk to you at length about this on return. *Private.* Ottley and all his crew look askance at it, as they think they will be belittled by it — but no such thing! It's a real weapon against the Admiralty and I do feel personally guilty in not having pushed it. However, no one has seen the weapon lying about and so we have completely escaped criticism so far. But as I ventured once to tell Mr. Balfour, 'the great secret of successful administration is an intelligent anticipation of agitation', and I have the feeling in my heart in advance that you will give your cordial support in this matter, more especially if you feel it makes the First Sea Lord 'sleep better at night'!

Please don't trouble to answer this.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

I suppose Noel clearly appreciates that he is to give a cordial and ungrudging support to Admiralty policy.[3] He used such violent

[1] The *Dreadnought*, whose first commander (1906) was Captain Bacon, had just completed her steam and gunnery trials.

[2] Afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock; Captain of the pre-dreadnought *Swiftsure*, 1906-1908.

[3] Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet) Sir Gerard Noel, Commander-in-Chief at the Nore, 1907-1908. As Commander-in-Chief of the China Station, 1904-1906, he had expressed himself forcibly on Fisher's ruthless reduction of his squadron.

language to me that his acceptance of the Nore greatly surprised me. To have a mutineer in high command would soon lead to awkwardness!

56: TO KING EDWARD

October 22nd, 1906

Sir John Fisher's humble duty to Your Majesty, and this is the proposed letter to the Prince of Wales for the King's approval.

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 23rd, 1906

Secret

Sir,

The King sent for me yesterday with reference to a letter from Your Royal Highness to His Majesty, portions of which the King read to me, expressing Your Royal Highness's deep anxiety as to the reported approaching re-arrangement by the Admiralty of the fighting disposition of the Fleet, and stating to the King that many Naval Officers shared Your Royal Highness's views, that the intended action of the Admiralty was open to the gravest condemnation.

The King ordered me to explain in detail the whole facts of the case, and was most graciously pleased at the termination of a very prolonged interview to express His Majesty's unabated confidence in the Board of Admiralty, and certainly our heartfelt gratitude goes out to the King for His Majesty's unswerving, unfaltering support of our actions in the troubled past in contending with unparalleled opposition from vested interests, both inside and outside the Navy, in our (I hope) successful endeavours to improve the fighting strength of the Fleet.

The King ordered me to send Your Royal Highness an exact repetition of all I had said to His Majesty, but Your Royal Highness will see that it is impossible to compress into a letter what occupied me more than an hour talking fast to the King — *but I will do my best!* and can only hope, if what I say does not convince Your Royal Highness as it convinced the King, that the Board of Admiralty is doing its duty fearlessly and with no other object in view than fighting efficiency, that you will please withhold any further strictures Your Royal Highness may feel disposed to make until I have had an opportunity of seeing Your Royal Highness and submitting

a further *viva voce* explanation of any points Your Royal Highness may still have doubts on.

These are the absolute facts of the case:—

Our only probable enemy is Germany. Germany keeps her *whole* Fleet always concentrated within a few hours of England. We must therefore keep a Fleet twice as powerful concentrated within a few hours of Germany.

If we kept the Channel and Atlantic Fleets *always* in the English Channel (say in the vicinity of the Nore), this would meet the case, but this is neither feasible nor expedient, and if, when relations with foreign powers are strained, the Admiralty attempt to take the proper fighting precautions and move our Channel and Atlantic Fleets to their proper fighting position, then *at once* the Foreign Office and the Government veto it, and say such a step will precipitate war! This actually happened on the recent occasion of the German Government presenting an ultimatum to acquire a coaling station at Madeira, and the German Minister was ordered to leave Lisbon at 10 p.m. on a certain Sunday night, and war was imminent, as Lord Lansdowne had told Portugal England would back her.[1] The Board of Admiralty don't intend ever again to subject themselves to this risk, and they have decided to form a new Home Fleet always at home, with its Headquarters at the Nore and its cruising ground the North Sea.

('Your battle ground should be your drill ground,' said Nelson!)

The politicians and the diplomatists will not be the people the Public will hang if the British Navy fails to annihilate the whole German Fleet and gobble up every single one of those 842 German merchant steamers now daily on the ocean! *No* — it will be the Sea Lords! and as one distinguished retrograde Admiral, Sir Gerard Noel (who wants to build sailing men-of-war), told the King, I am to have the proud pre-eminence of Haman amongst the Sea Lords.

[1] The ultimatum delivered by the German Chargé d'Affaires to the Portuguese Government on November 3rd, 1905, was *not* in connection with a German demand for a coaling station in Madeira. In 1903 a concession had been obtained by a German syndicate for the construction of sanatoria in Madeira, the real object of which turned out, by 1905, to be commercial and gambling. Because the terms of the concession, which included a right to expropriate other properties in the area, would have affected British-owned properties and the British Consulate, there were strong representations by the Foreign Office. The German ultimatum of November 3rd, insisting that the Portuguese agree to the demand for expropriation by November 5th, was rejected. The German Chargé did not leave Lisbon, and, indeed, denied that there had been an ultimatum. British backing explains the firm stand of the Portuguese. But the possibility that part of the area to be expropriated might be used as a coaling wharf seems to have caused the British Government little or no concern.

I never have been able to ascertain how high Haman was hung, but it couldn't have been higher than Noel wishes me! and yet I patiently enjoy his receiving the high and important command of the Nore! If this isn't charity, I don't know what it is. I digress to make this remark to Your Royal Highness, as I am accused of relentless hate towards those who differ from me!

To return to the argument:—The only way to obtain this new 'Home Fleet' is by moving six battleships and four armoured cruisers from the Channel, Mediterranean, and Atlantic Fleets (observing that these 3 Fleets are 50 per cent stronger than the present political situation demands), and combining them with the best of the battleships and cruisers now in commission in Reserve, forming an '*Escadre d'Élite*,' backed up by the remainder of the ships in Reserve, as the Reserve or Second Division of this new Home Fleet. The whole of the torpedo craft (some 150 in number) and the whole of the submarines will be incorporated with this '*Escadre d'Élite*' of the Home Fleet, and their crews so increased as to be almost at full strength.

Admiral Bridgeman (about the best Admiral we have) is to be the Commander-in-Chief of this new Home Fleet,[1] with his Headquarters at the Nore and his cruising ground the North Sea, where the fight will be! perhaps off Heligoland (which was won by the sword and given up by the pen!).

The Board of Admiralty have also decided to adopt a 'sliding scale' of nucleus crews — thus the most important vessels will have the largest nucleus crews, and the least important not perhaps more than a skeleton crew. For instance, the 'Royal Sovereign' class of battleship, almost obsolete and dangerous for the line of battle owing to their unarmed [unarmoured?] ends as against modern high explosive shell, will be relegated to the lowest scale of crew, whilst those required for the first brunt of war will be almost at concert pitch!

This new 'Home Fleet' thus called into being by Mr. Balfour's famous 'stroke of the pen' almost admits of more seagoing work being given to the ships in Reserve, *together with the essential fighting training they do not now get in Battle Practice and other important Fleet Exercises.*

I beg you, Sir, to note especially the following facts:—By this new distribution of the Fleet *not a single ship will be paid off, nor is there the*

[1] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Francis C. B. Bridgeman, Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1906-1907, Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, 1907-1909, later First Sea Lord, 1911-1912. 'There are few people to whom I am under a greater obligation . . . This distinguished sailor aided me in the gradual building up of the Grand Fleet' (*Memories*, p. 246).

reduction of one single man serving on board ship, and the Fleet, AS A WHOLE, *will have more sea work than at present,* but there is also this further advantage, of immense value, that if any ship in the Channel, Mediterranean, or Atlantic Fleets, has to be long absent from her cruising ground, on account of repairs, her place will be AT ONCE temporarily filled from the Home Fleet.

Pure party feeling solely dictates the present '*Press*' agitation. The Board of Admiralty and *no one else whatever* can be responsible for the distribution of the Fleet for War, and the Board is united and determined in their belief that they are acting for the good of the Navy and the safety of the Empire in this and every other step which has been taken. *Reduced Navy Estimates are no sign of reduced naval efficiency.* On the contrary, swollen Estimates engender parasites, both in men and ships, which hamper the fighting qualities of the Fleet. The pruning knife ain't pleasant for fossils and ineffectives, but it has to be used, and the tree is more vigorous for the loss of excrescences.[1]

I am, Sir, Your Royal Highness's obedient servant,

J. A. Fisher

57: TO KING EDWARD

November 3rd, 1906

. . . Sir C. Hardinge's Memorandum on Foreign Office requirements in regard to the Navy[2] when examined in detail *does not state one single case* in which up to the present date any case has actually occurred of any injury to British interests due to the absence of a vessel of war. No — it is a series of 'ifs'! The absolute fact is that the Admiralty always know better than the Foreign Office and more

[1] Apparently the letter was approved by the King without change. On the same day, October 23rd, the Prince had Fisher for lunch. Afterwards the Admiral wrote Knollys: '*He is cordially in agreement with all the Admiralty are doing.* I was two hours with His Royal Highness. I gave him the patriots' motto in reply to the charge of the Tory Press that I am pandering to C. B. [Campbell-Bannerman]:

"Sworn to no party, of no sect am I.
I can't be silent and I will not lie!"

I have voted consistently for both sides, whichever did most for the Navy!' Let it be added here that Fisher had a strong leaning towards the Liberals. He thought the Conservative Party was 'hopeless' and 'stupid' (Fisher to Esher, July 12th, 1912). Esher's Liberal politics helped to colour the Admiral's political outlook.

[2] Sir Charles Hardinge (afterwards first Baron Hardinge of Penshurst), Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1906-1910, expressed doubt in his memorandum about the wisdom, from the Foreign Office point of view, of Fisher's redistribution policy.

wisely than the Consuls when vessels are likely to be required, because the Naval Officer on the spot is invariably a better and more reliable judge than the frightened or gunboat-desiring Consuls, who one and all pine for the prestige of the presence of a man-of-war within signalling distance of the consular flagstaff and for the consular salute of seven guns!

A print has been prepared at the Admiralty in anticipation of this Foreign Office onslaught which proves the above statement and quotes cases where the Admiralty, acting on the advice of the better informed naval opinion, has successfully resisted what proved to be unnecessary demands for the presence of British men-of-war. It is not questioned that it would be both popular and preferable for the British gunboat to be everywhere, but if everybody had everything that was desirable, the Navy Estimates would be a hundred millions! The Admiralty are prepared to maintain before any tribunal that, being as fully cognizant through their Naval Officers on the spot as the Foreign Office — and the Sea Lords themselves having had life-long experience themselves of the requirements of the various stations — the Admiralty have made all reasonable provision against British interests being interfered with or the safety of British lives and property being endangered. What as a matter of fact does happen is that the British Navy does the police work of all other countries as well as its own, and it is suggested to the Foreign Office that it would be an excellent thing if other countries did help in the manner indicated as having been probable in the case of the German ship *Bussard*! However, the whole of Sir C. Harding's Memorandum is completely dealt with by the following statement:

I. Not one single cruiser, large or small, has been or will be withdrawn from either the Mediterranean or any foreign station, nor was there any intention of so doing.

II. The present disposition of vessels has existed for two years without a single case of default on the part of the Admiralty to meet Foreign Office requirements, but, on the contrary, the Admiralty have successfully resisted unnecessary demands involving large naval expenditure. (This is all given in the Admiralty print which is ready for issue.)

III. The statement on page 3 that the effective strength of the seagoing Fleets is being reduced to a dangerous minimum is absolutely erroneous, *for the exact contrary is the fact!* The real truth is we have enormously increased both our readiness for war

and our *instant* fighting strength, but to give these fighting details would be simply suicidal, for, if circulated (however confidentially), they would be at the German Admiralty in a week. No — as Sir Edward Grey says, no Department *nor any one else* must question the steps taken by the Board of Admiralty in the disposition of the fighting units of the Fleet.

The actual statements made in the Foreign Office Memorandum will be duly refuted in detail when officially received by the Admiralty, but this general and absolute denial seems called for at once to allay any anxiety which the Foreign Office fears of Admiralty policy may have caused.

J. F.

58: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

December 17th, 1906

Dear Lord Knollys,

. . . I have seen Captain Dumas to-day. He tells me I am the most hated man in Germany! I think that proves we are doing the right things in the British Navy and I accept it as a compliment. I am not sure I am not the best hated man over here as well! but so long as the King gives me the splendid support His Majesty has so consistently done, my position is impregnable and the fighting efficiency of our Fleet and its instant readiness for war gets no check. I simply say the *sincere* truth, and I think you know it, that His Majesty's gracious and kind confidence in me really means everything! . . .

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

59: TO JAMES R. THURSFIELD

Christmas Day, 1906

Private and Confidential

My dear Thursfield,

Unexpectedly Lord Esher came to see me two days ago and spent two hours with me. You know he is a 'man of affairs' and is more in the hidden counsels of the King and his Ministers (and '*His Majesty's*

Opposition' also!) than perhaps any man living! He is my most intimate personal friend! That is why he came to see me. This is what he came to say to me, as briefly as I can condense two hours into four sheets of paper:

'Campbell-Bannerman, Grey, Haldane, Morley, John Burns (*especially*), Balfour, Lansdowne, Cawdor, Pretyman, Lee, the King, Knollys, Lord Burnham,[1] and many others influential but less significant to be named are each of them one and all known to me personally to be *absolutely with you* in all you *are doing* and *have done* and *intend to do*. You have got the complete and unfaltering confidence of each one of these men and you have mine, and I admit to the full the force of what you have said to the King that the recent attempt at a scare has been "Heaven-sent," as it enabled you to carry out your plan of *October 21, 1904*, of having a "*Home Fleet*", but it was not allowed then or later for urgent and correct political reasons, but it has now slipped in un-noticed and un-aggressively.'

BUT *the time has now arrived* for a 'Justification Paper', as the French would say, and I suggest to you to see Mr. Buckle, trust him implicitly, *show him everything*, and let *The Times* prepare its own series of articles, every one of which can be grounded on common knowledge, but your papers will assure him he is on the BED ROCK OF CERTAINTY in all he says. This *infinitely* better than any Admiralty minute or official *exposé des motifs*, and *The Times* is the *only vehicle* and the *only authority that will be accepted* and be [rest lacking].[2]

[1] John Morley (afterwards first Viscount Morley of Blackburn), Secretary of State for India, 1905-1910; John Burns, President of the Local Government Board, 1905-1914; Ernest G. Pretyman, onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1900-1903) and Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (1903-1906); Arthur H. Lee (afterwards first Viscount Lee of Fareham), onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1903-1905), later First Lord of the Admiralty, 1921-1922; the first Baron Burnham, principal proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, 'ever my great Friend, he was also a splendid man' (*Records*, p. 32).

[2] On December 30th Thursfield recommended to George Earle Buckle (Editor of *The Times*, 1884-1912) as 'a public service' that he be allowed to do a series of articles on 'The Naval Situation: From a Correspondent'. The object would be to see whether there was 'any substantial ground for the change of attitude [towards the Admiralty] which has lately made itself manifest . . . Of course I am not going to write an apologia of the Admiralty, but I am bound to say that the more I study its policy and proceedings, the more I am convinced that there is very little to find fault with, not more than any intelligent and well-informed man can always find if he looks for it in any large scheme of policy and administration'. This letter, seen before the Thursfield Papers were deposited at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, is now unaccountably missing. Buckle approved the idea, and a series of eight articles appeared early in 1907. Fisher was not over-enthusiastic. '*The Times* articles are good, but there is no "hitting out" in them!' (Fisher to Corbett, January 31st, 1907).

60: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Travellers' Club
Pall Mall, S.W.
December 31st, 1906

Private

My dear Arnold White,

You've fired a fine broadside in the *Spectator* this week! Hit them between wind and water! Mr. Hurd, writing me this morning, is full of the efficacy of your letter![1] *I thank you for it!*

Here's a gem and a conundrum for you! Since October 21, 1904 (the day with which Mr. H. W. Wilson opens his attack on me in the *National Review* for December), no vessel has been laid down in the British Navy without a turbine instead of reciprocating engines, and all this while foreign Admiralties are still having commissions of enquiry anent the turbine sent over to England. (The *Dreadnought* is going to give them an object lesson on January 5. She's about to steam 9,000 miles before returning to England at the end of March!) Well, *here is the gem!* The turbine is admitted to be so simple in its working that the present engineering acquirements will be 50 per cent in excess of requirements, so that disposes of the life-long experience that pestilent asses like Bellairs state is required by our Engineer Officers! And here is the conundrum! Add up all the hundreds and hundreds of Engineer Officers in the Navy List and ask Bellairs & Co. what would they have done with the redundancy of these officers in the near future, when some 50 per cent less Engineer Officers will be required than now, owing to the introduction of the turbine, and WHEN ALREADY the engines of vessels at sea are being DIRECTLY controlled by handles on the bridge like a motor car. The fact is we are coming to chauffeurs! and any d—d fool will be good enough almost for the engine-room! Under the new scheme of training the redundancy of Engineer Officers are merged in the executive and marine branches, for which they are only qualified!

Ever yours, in haste and exasperation at the silly idiots whom the uninformed and ignorant editors allow to disport themselves in their papers in big print! *Vide* Bridge in *Glasgow Herald.*

J. F.

[1] Archibald (afterwards Sir Archibald) S. Hurd, a leader-writer and the Naval Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, 1899-1928, and staunch Fisherite. Fisher described him as 'a very quick-witted satellite of Lord Burnham's on the *Daily Telegraph*' (Fisher to Corbett, February 11th, 1907). White's letter in the *Spectator* (December 29th) pointed out the markedly improved fleet gunnery since Fisher had come to office.

Hurd says *Spectator* suppressing correspondence against the articles by 'Civis,' though the Editor swore it should not be so.[1] This is a good sign, I suppose.

Admiral Bridge talks of the inefficiency and inadequacy of the nucleus crews. He doesn't say that before October 21, 1904, *there were no crews at all!* And how COULD there be gunnery proficiency without the expert portion of the officers and crew, as in the Nucleus Crew System, being associated together for continuous practice beforehand? Then the malignant Custance, who was to be such a good boy and speak the truth, comes out in *Blackwood* [January] with an utterly misleading and untruthful article on cruisers! But I'll send you a copy of my paper, nothing short of which simply pulverizes him!

61: TO ?

January 3rd, 1907

My dear ——,

A naval friend in the enemy's camp told me the day before yesterday that the 'Syndicate of Discontent' (as they call these Naval Adullamites!) were now about to redouble their efforts against the Admiralty, as they thought there was an official wavering and faltering and lukewarmness, and also he told me the 'Syndicate' is much encouraged by no categorical official denial having been given to Mr. Bellairs's seemingly authoritative statement, which he is actively disseminating in the Press (and the *Spectator* is also propagating), of the Government acceding to an enquiry into recent Admiralty reforms and policy. And, sure enough, all the Yellow Admirals[2] seem to have taken fresh heart! (Yellow, I suppose, with suppressed jaundice at the unalloyed success of the Admiralty policy from the *Dreadnought* down to bread-baking!)

Bridge in the *Glasgow Herald*, Fremantle[3] in the [*Daily*] *Express*,

[1] 'Civis' was Sir William White, and the Editor and proprietor of the *Spectator*, 1898-1925, was John St. Loe Strachey, one of the most virulent critics of Fisher's reforms. Civis's articles (published in book form in 1907 with a strong introduction by Strachey) urged the need for an inquiry into Admiralty policy and 'furnished many illustrations of hasty and ill-considered action on the part of the Admiralty in making radical changes'.

[2] 'Yellow Admiral' was the nickname for admirals (mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century) appointed to posts which actually did not exist. It was a device for getting rid of senior officers not wanted by the Admiralty. The term was apt, since yellow was the flag for Quarantine.

[3] Admiral (ret.) the Hon. Sir Edmund Fremantle, Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, 1906-1908.

FitzGerald in *The Times*, and Custance, in the most malignant and erroneous of all his articles, in the January *Blackwood* (he was going to be such a good boy if he got an appointment!!!);[1] one and all of these are rabid in their attacks. . . .

We don't hit back, or if we do, we apologize! (A negative attitude is *never* successful! An attack should always be met by a counter-attack!) We pander to traitors in our own camp; we subsidize our critics at the Royal United Service Institution, and we fawn on our foes and give them barley sugar instead of a black eye! I am getting very sick of this '*taking it lying down*' apologetic line of policy! *The Admiralty policy has not failed in any one single point and will not fail! Success is absolutely assured!* But this timorous line of conduct is very disheartening! There should be no doubt allowed to exist anywhere of our unflinching determination to have Admiralty orders obeyed and Admiralty policy cordially and even enthusiastically supported! (I am looking forward to old Bosanquet[2] trying someone at Portsmouth for *lèse-majesté*.)

Again, it is utter rot to talk of '*what will the Service think?*' *Who is the 'Service'?* Nobody can ever answer! You never can get names in reply to that question! It is really the unsuccessful and the discontented! those who are disloyal to the Admiralty! No matter who the Board of Admiralty consist of, or what is their policy, these malcontents are always 'agin the Government'.

As the *Morning Leader* well said the other day, the whole justification of the Admiralty Reforms lies in the opening sentences of what the *Morning Leader* calls the 'dastardly attack' on the Admiralty in the *National Review* for December, where it is stated that two years ago —

(1) Our Fleets were wrongly distributed.
(2) There was a multitude of inefficient ships.
(3) The vessels in Reserve had no crews.
(4) The Dockyards had 6,000 more workmen than were required, and seven foreign Dockyards, useless for war, were draining our resources.
(5) The Engineers in the Navy were in revolt.
(6) We were still educating our officers and men to reef topsails.
(7) We were frightened at the turbine, and we dreaded the *Dreadnought*.

[1] Custance was shortly to take over as Second-in-Command of the Channel Fleet, 1907-1908. He had been appointed to the command in November 1906.
[2] Admiral Sir Day Bosanquet, about to assume command at Portsmouth, 1907-1908.

We have built the *Dreadnought*; we have stopped all foreign shipbuilding for 16 months; we have successfully adopted the turbine, and we have reduced the Navy Estimates by 5 millions (and shall reduce them still more!), while the Navy is incomparably stronger and more ready for fighting than it was two years ago. Our Fleets are 50 per cent. more at sea, and we hit the target 50 per cent. more than we did two years ago.

In the first year there were
2,000 more misses than hits!
In the second year there were
2,000 more hits than misses!

Let us, therefore, give up apologizing and support our supporters! We get Commodore Galloway to step into the breach and then allow him to be fired at! It's cheap bravery of Admiral FitzGerald's![1] He knows no one will hit him back! It's like his speeches at the Navy Club dinners; he knows he is not to be answered!

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

62: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 8th, 1907

Secret

My dear Arnold White,

I had contemplated inducing you to spare me an hour next week and have lunch with me, but the King has capsized my plans by

[1] Commodore (afterwards Admiral) Arthur A. C. Galloway, selected to command the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth after the mutiny in 1906, had issued a general memorandum on Christmas Day, 1906. It included these passages: 'The Commodore observes with some satisfaction a considerable improvement in the appearance, alertness, and general smartness of his new comrades, and feels the most perfect confidence in their manliness to assist him and Com. Sinclair in the task of making Portsmouth Barracks the first naval depôt of the civilized world, in the same way as the recent battleship he has had the happiness to command . . . The Commodore finally points out that he considers every individual under his command as being specially under his protection, and therefore to be shielded from injustice. He has no effeminate partiality for one body of men more than another' (*The Times*, December 26th, 1906). Admiral (ret.) C. C. Penrose FitzGerald, in a letter published in *The Times*, January 2nd, took exception to the 'general tone' of the memorandum ('buncombe', 'blather'). 'But the worst of it is that the commodore is merely following the evil example which has been set him by those in more exalted positions – the example of noisy, blatant, popularity-hunting self-advertisement . . .' Fisher noted on a letter of 1915 from FitzGerald asking a favour, which was granted: 'This is an Admiral who from being a close friend became my *malignant* enemy!'

asking me to stay on board the Royal Yacht, and I am to go down with the Queen on Saturday morning. (They think I'm burning the candle at both ends. It's the only way I can make both ends meet!)

As to shipbuilding, please, in strict secrecy, see enclosed and return to me. Everyone is in a fog, and a good thing, too! The truth is we don't want anyone to know the truth. It keeps the foreigners mystified. We shall have 4 Dreadnoughts ready to fight before a single foreign Dreadnought is launched. But we don't want to say this. We have 3 'Invincibles' building, which some people think stronger than Dreadnoughts — this also a secret — and we have a pledge to lay down 3 more Dreadnoughts next year (as nothing will come of the Hague Conference). Practically *10* Dreadnoughts! All we have done is to drop one this year which it was indefensible to retain, as we are more than equal to any combination! And the *Globe* and others call me 'traitor' and all kinds of silly names!

But I don't want you to say a word! I don't mind odium and when in about 18 months' time people see Dreadnoughts coming up like mushrooms, they'll sing 'Hosanna' instead of 'Crucify'!

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

63: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 15th, 1907

Dear Corbett,

Couldn't be better![1] All I feel is there ought to be a second article with your wealth of exposition! But anything more or less would spoil the present article, for it is *just* the thing 'to meet the present distress', as St. Paul would say!

Yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] The proofs of Corbett's article, 'Recent Attacks on the Admiralty', which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* for February 1907. Its effect when published was 'immense', thought Fisher. He was to refer to it again and again in later years with profound gratitude. 'I shall ever treasure your great help to me in time of need, and your *Nineteenth Century* article never leaves my heart.' It 'will ever remain unparalleled and immortal, and splendid in its friendship, because so against your interests' (Fisher to Corbett, January 27th, 1910, January 29th, 1911). Though the article was inspired by Fisher, and was based on confidential Admiralty material, it represented Corbett's independent judgment of the Fisher reforms. Fisher's first reaction was to try to pry another article out of Corbett. 'But *what a paper* you could give us on Fleet distribution, protection of commerce, entry and training, Dockyard policy! Won't you be tempted? Are you going to keep that talent wrapped up in the napkin of criminal modesty?' (Fisher to Corbett, January 16th, 1907). Corbett preferred to reserve his fire.

64: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 19th, 1907

Private

My dear Friend,

. . . We can sleep quiet in our beds! Beresford, having had one month's leave, has asked for another month to go abroad for his health's sake, so that 'bolt from the blue' can't be coming, or the 'one man on whom all depends' would surely ask that some other Admiral should take his place (and that he resign), to be ready for the German invasion, which is to come without warning like the last trump! Without a simple premonitory sign!

I had a two hours *tête-à-tête* with Winston Churchill,[1] wanting to do battle on my behalf, but I told him 'silence' was the watchword.

Kindly read enclosed, prepared for the Cabinet, and return to me with any marginal corrections which you think would improve it. I rely on you not to use any phrases in it by inadvertence, as I want to keep it secret and also to avoid giving any hold to opponents by their surmising your having seen it.

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

Postscript. Winston said he felt a great fellow-feeling with me, as I always painted with a big brush! And he made a sage remark, I thought, about Balfour's want of popularity — that he saw too much of both sides and was never violent! I think he is right. 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force'!

[1] Afterwards Sir Winston Churchill; Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1906-1908. The two had met only recently. They got along famously – until 1909, as we shall see. They met again at Biarritz in the first days of April, when Fisher 'fell desperately in love with Winston Churchill. I think he's quite the nicest fellow I ever met and such a quick brain that it's a delight to talk to him' (Fisher to Tweedmouth, April 10th, 1907). The King found Fisher and Churchill 'most amusing together. I call them the "chatterers" ' (King Edward to Lady Londonderry, April 4th, 1907; Sir Sidney Lee: *King Edward VII, a Biography* [2 vols., London, 1925, 1927], II, 534).

65: TO JAMES R. THURSFIELD

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 20th, 1907

Private

Dear Thursfield,

. . . I see the *Globe* has a leading article attacking the Admiralty for not having an ambulance corps of cruisers and gunboats distributed over the earthquake area of the globe![1] (That's not a joke!) The Navy Estimates would be a hundred millions if everyone had everything!

The funny thing is we get a most cordial and unaccustomed official letter from Lord Elgin thanking the Admiralty for sending two cruisers loaded with tents and provisions from Trinidad and Bermuda so very promptly and expeditiously! The *Globe* calmly suppresses these two cruisers, the *Indefatigable* and *Brilliant*! What a surpassing advantage it is to be able to lie freely!

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

66: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 21st, 1907

Dear Lambert,

Your letter splendid! I had three hours with Beresford yesterday, and all is settled, and the Admiralty don't give in one inch to his demands, but I had as a preliminary to agree to three things:—

I. Lord C. Beresford is a greater man than Nelson.
II. No one knows anything about the art of naval war except Lord C. Beresford.
III. The Admiralty haven't done a single d—d thing right!

Poor old Robertson has sent me a maudlin letter this morning and winds up with the pathetic statement that he is suffering from an utter want of confidence in himself!

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

[1] A great earthquake, followed by fire, was experienced in Jamaica on January 14th-16th, 1907. Kingston was destroyed and the loss of life was heavy. On the 16th three U.S. warships arrived with medical aid. The British cruisers *Indefatigable* and *Brilliant* arrived with relief supplies several days later. The charge was made, in England and the West Indies, that the withdrawal of the old North American and West Indies Squadron (which had become the 4th Cruiser Squadron, based on home ports) had deprived Jamaica of the assistance of the Navy in its hour of sorest need. (In 1913 the Squadron was transferred from English ports to Bermuda for duty in the West Atlantic.)

67: TO ?

January 24th, 1907

Dear ——,

I think I had better send you a few lines, as we appear to be approaching a crisis! . . .

The withdrawal of certain ships from the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Channel Fleets, and the adoption of a new system of apportioning the nucleus crews, enabled the *full manning* to be carried out of 12 battleships and armoured cruisers and 48 destroyers and the other attendant vessels required as auxiliaries, and also permitted all the remainder of the nucleus crew ships to have an increase of 25 per cent in their crews, and in association with all this it was decided that instead of all these ships in Commission in Reserve being without an organization enabling them to act together, they should all be formed into a complete Fleet, called the Home Fleet, under the supreme command of one Admiral as a Commander-in-Chief, instead of, as heretofore, being under the separate orders of the three Commanders-in-Chief of the Home Ports, who did not take them to sea and had only a peace responsibility for them.

We might have left the whole thing alone and simply increased the nucleus crews, but because we have organized them into a Fleet under the direct responsibility of a Commander-in-Chief, the cry is now raised that they should get as much sea work as the Channel Fleet, and all be fully manned. This has been calculated to cost about four millions sterling!!! But we are already more than strong enough as it is — why add another four millions to the Navy Estimates to keep the whole British Navy on a permanent war footing during a period of profound peace?

The Channel Fleet as about to be constituted, together with its allied First Cruiser Squadron, is of itself a match for the German Fleet, and reinforced by the Atlantic Fleet it has an overwhelming superiority. But Foreign Office pressure may again, as in times past, lead to these Fleets being absent from Home Waters, and to provide against a sudden raid of the German Fleet (its only chance of success) the Home Fleet as now constituted will form a sure defence when its organization is complete in May 1908. . . .

Lord Charles Beresford now dictates terms before he will accept the command of the Channel Fleet. He requires that Fleet to be increased by cruisers and destroyers, and that the Home Fleet shall come under his command. This means largely increasing the Navy

Estimates as decided upon by the Board and approved by the Prime Minister. But it also means a great deal more if acceded to — it means that the Board of Admiralty will abdicate its functions and take its instructions from an irresponsible subordinate, who is totally unacquainted with the world requirements of the British Navy, and is only thinking of magnifying his own particular command, which is far stronger under the new conditions than when it was first commanded by his distinguished predecessor, Sir A. Wilson.

For my part I am not prepared to be a party to any outside dictation whatever. The Board of Admiralty are united in their policy, and should stand no humbug nor any questioning of their policy by those under their orders. 'Them's my sentiments.'

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

68: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

January 27th, 1907

My dear Friend,

I followed your advice and wrote a most cordial letter to Beresford, and I enclose you his reply. It will not be my fault if he resigns, as Tweedmouth says he will. My conviction is he wants to get into Parliament and hates the Channel.[1] Anyhow, as explained in enclosed print, it is simply impossible to submit to Beresford's dictation. *The position would be intolerable ever after!*

I got Sir C. Drury to hand the Statement of the Sea Lords to Tweedmouth as being less threatening than had I done it — also it prevented any idea of Tweedmouth thinking that I alone was the rebel!

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

I have not said a word to a soul except you as to all business with Beresford, or the intended resignation of the Sea Lords if there

[1] 'My conviction is that Beresford funks the Channel and wants to clear out! Fogs and short days and difficult navigation very different to Mediterranean white trousers!!! Wilson also hard to follow' (Fisher to White, February 17th, 1907).

is any truckling to either Beresford or to Parliamentary pressure to have an enquiry into Admiralty policy[1]. . . .

69: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
February 18th, 1907

Private

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . Jackson has been to see me this afternoon about Beresford, and all Jackson says is unanswerable as to Beresford's conduct and the blow to discipline and the lowering of Admiralty authority. *It is only putting off the evil day!* but having adopted the policy of endeavouring to keep him, and in view of the action that has been taken, there seems no other course but to go on as now arranged. The way it has been engineered by Beresford (Bellairs being his tool) extorts one's admiration. Our difficulty is that on the strength of Beresford's loyal acceptance we appointed Custance, and that puts us in a regular hole, as we can't appoint May[2] (the proper man if Beresford goes) without getting rid of Custance, and there's no place for him till next December! Of course, it *could* be done. The whole affair is about the worst on record, *especially when one knows the secret part of it.*

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Fisher maintained that the ultimatum of the Sea Lords was 'NOT at my instigation' (Fisher to Cawdor, February 3rd, 1907). An agreement was reached with Beresford on January 28th, which disposed of the first part of the Sea Lords' ultimatum. The second part remained. Fisher was afraid the Government wanted to throw him 'to the wolves' when Parliament met, but he was heartened by Balfour's support. The latter told Fisher on January 30th that 'he would resist any enquiry into Admiralty policy to the utmost of his power. Lord Goschen is apparently the only formidable malcontent' (Fisher to Cawdor, February 3rd, 1907). Arthur Lee, Balfour's lieutenant in defence matters, also expressed himself as 'dead against' an inquiry. 'I am all for crucifying the Board, if they deserve it, but who is there competent to "enquire" into them? The worst of it is your "Committee of 3" on the War Office was a bad precedent, but I am always in favour of damning precedents' (Lee to Fisher, February 8th, 1907).

[2] Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet) Sir William May, whose term as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, 1905-1907, was about to expire. He succeeded Drury as Second Sea Lord in March (-1909).

70: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
February 23rd, 1907

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . As to the *Inflexible*, I feel your kindness exceedingly, but would prefer not. It would necessitate my making a speech, and I don't want to make one till I can, without embarrassment to anyone, expose Bridge, Custance, FitzGerald, Noel & Co., who one and all never did one single thing for the good of the Navy, and also I am anxious to expose Sir W. White and shatter his bubble reputation. Also I want to show later on, in a very conclusive manner beyond question and beyond argument, that there is not one single little item of Admiralty policy that has failed, beginning with Osborne in December 1902 and ending with the *Dreadnought* in December 1906. I want to get my knife in freely and without stint, AND I SHALL SUCCEED! But the psychological moment will not be the launch of the *Inflexible*! All the same, I am exceedingly grateful to you for your kind thought and your renewed offer.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

I will be at Admiralty on Monday — cured! There is one subject I have so much at heart that I hope you won't mind my recurring to it, as if you do not emphasize it in your coming Parliamentary Statement, I feel it will be a vital mistake; but if you do, then we cut the ground from under an agitation that must succeed, because such an agitation would be founded on justice and efficiency, and we shall then 'direct the whirlwind and control the storm,' *instead of the matter being forced down our throats!* I mean opening the career of a Naval Officer to all ranks in life by State-aided education. You will remember in the paper I gave you on this subject I proved how very small a proportion of parents could afford to send their sons into the Navy. This is also bad for efficiency, as brains don't go with money. Neither can we withstand the just and reasonable democratic demand for a wider area of selection for our Naval Officers. I am quite aware the Army is a plutocracy — cramming is responsible for that — due to competitive examination! John Snooks, weaver, can't afford to send his son up to 18 years of age to

Wren and Gurney,[1] etc. I hope therefore you will kindly emphasize this matter in your Parliamentary Statement.

71: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 9th, 1907

Secret

Dear Corbett,

I trust you will kindly excuse haste and pencil, as I am very busy! First let me offer you my delight at your lecture at R. U. S. Institute, which is splendid.[2] Secondly, I had to go before the Cabinet a few days ago, and I gave them the gist of what is in this paper, and I think it may interest you. Please return it at your leisure. THIRD, AND CHIEFLY, I would be glad to see you on a very secret matter about some war plans to which I think you could add most materially in their educational value.[3] However, I leave this to mention to you in detail when we meet. If you could kindly come *any time* next Tuesday, I should be under a great obligation to you.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

Private

It was a sight for men and Angels (but *please never mention it!*) Lloyd George, John Burns, and McKenna[4] with bits of blotting paper explaining to the First Sea Lord the strategic advantages of the present distribution of the Fleet, leading up to their idea that we were really in a position to have only half our present Navy! However, they were all very nice, and the even tenor of Admiralty policy is not to be interfered with, and they kindly promised to mind their own business in future!

[1] Wren's was one of the leading coaching establishments for the armed services as well as for the higher divisions of the Home and Indian Civil Service. Presumably Gurney's was a similar cramming school.

[2] Corbett's brilliant defence, on historical grounds, of 'The Strategical Value of Speed in Battle Ships', given on March 6th and published in the *Journal* of the Royal United Service Institution, July 1907.

[3] Fisher later asked Corbett to write a preface to these war plans, which appeared, dated May 1st (apparently with some changes by Fisher), as 'Some Principles of Naval Warfare'. The authorship was hidden at Corbett's urgent request but did not remain a secret long. The paper was strongly resented by Beresford and Custance.

[4] David Lloyd George (afterwards first Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor), President of the Board of Trade, 1905-1908, later Prime Minister, 1916-1922; Reginald McKenna, President of the Board of Education, 1907-1908.

72: TO ADMIRAL LORD CHARLES BERESFORD

April 22nd, 1907

Private

My dear Beresford,

I am just back at Admiralty and write to say I am ready to see you any day convenient to you to come up.

I had a letter of yours planted in my hand 5 minutes after I arrived, with the proposed answer, which I suppose had better go to you; but I was hoping that hereafter all such questions could be arranged without these official State papers; nor is it conducive to the harmonious working which is essential, if your Staff are always preparing ammunition for you to fire off at the Admiralty. . . .

All I wish to assure you is that so far as I am concerned I am most anxious that we should avoid friction and undesirable correspondence — and so I think in all ways desirable that we should discuss things personally.

I see something about Custance navigating his Fleet at night in the centre of the line. I hope we are not going to have any changes from the custom of the Service without Admiralty authority, or at all events their knowledge.

In violent haste, Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

73: FROM ADMIRAL LORD CHARLES BERESFORD

H.M.S. *King Edward VII*
Channel Fleet
April 22nd, 1907

My dear Admiral,

. . . I quite agree that all that can be done verbally hastens matters better than correspondence, but you are quite wrong in thinking that I allow my Staff or anyone else to prepare anything for me to fire off at Admiralty or other individuals. All my correspondence good, bad, and indifferent, emanates in what I am pleased to call my brain, as 'Dizzy' [Disraeli] once said. There is not the slightest chance of any friction between me and you, or between me and anyone else. When the friction begins, I am off. If a senior and a junior have a row, the junior is wrong under any conceivable condition, or discipline could not go on. As long as I am here I will do my best to make the Admiralty policy a success.

I have not heard that Custance navigated his fleet in the centre of the line at night, but I will see about it. Such a proceeding would be unwise and dangerous. He tried some very useful evolutions getting from cruising half-distance formation into manœuvring distance, which must be practised for big battle fleets in the North Sea. I think there is a better plan than his and am going to try it this week. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

Charles Beresford

74: TO ADMIRAL LORD CHARLES BERESFORD

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 30th, 1907

My dear Beresford,

I am so glad to learn from your letter of yesterday that Ottley satisfied you, and I have no doubts or misgivings at all but that all will go smoothly and satisfactorily in the perfecting of all our arrangements for war, and I welcome your assurance that 'you will do all you can *verbally* and not resort to paper'. Also, the *modus operandi* you sketch out is excellent, and (as I told you) Room 42A is at your service, and Ottley and his Staff always at hand to afford you any information you may desire. I think also your suggestion about the Atlantic Fleet making a surprise attack is well worth consideration. I will write to Curzon[1] about it before taking any further steps.

I suggest to you, as a personal request, not to write as you propose for the plan of war that Wilson would have carried out, as really no good purpose would be served thereby, because of the continuous change of conditions so completely altering any such plan, and (as we agreed) even a plan for December is not suitable for June, because of the climatic conditions of a Northern winter and summer — the continuous daylight in June requiring very different arrangements to the short daylight of December!

The eight different ideas in the print I gave you furnish (I think) a sufficient basis for all the present purposes — not that I think them in any way so perfect as not to admit of considerable alteration and improvement.

We need not be in the least disquieted about the Germans. There is much more than the First Lord had time to tell you, to give us absolute confidence as to our position.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) the Hon. Sir Assheton Curzon-Howe, Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, 1907-1908.

75: FROM ADMIRAL LORD CHARLES BERESFORD

H.M.S. *King Edward VII*
May 2nd, 1907

My dear Admiral,

I am pegging away at my plan of campaign for war with Germany, based on instant action, which entails the names of all ships *really ready* to proceed at once to carry out the work that they will be detailed to do. When I have roughed out all plans, I will send C. O. S. [Chief of Staff] to my room at Admiralty and make out all the details as to ships with D. N. I. [Director of Naval Intelligence]. After that I will go carefully through it again myself and submit the whole plan to you for the Board.

I am loath to appear discourteous, but I cannot see why you ask me not to write a letter asking for the plans and orders extant relative to preparation and duties of the different component parts of the Channel Fleet for instant action if war had been declared. Such plans must be of infinite utility to me, and save me an enormous amount of work in solving an extremely knotty and difficult problem, and also save me from again panning out what has been panned out already. On reconsideration I am satisfied that you will see my point. I quite agree as to your June and December argument, but that equally applies to the past as the present. I am not disquieted about the Germans as a force, but I am disquieted, as the man who would have to do the excutive work, at the possibility of having to make out all the details of attack, as to ships, etc., on strained relations, or war being declared *after* such incidents occurred. As affairs present themselves to me at this moment, this is undoubtedly the case. The Germans may be as unready as the First Lord described in the House, but the information is probably given on the authority of an individual, who must have got it second hand. Anyhow, we ought be so ready that we can just laugh. We are most certainly not so at present.

Yours very sincerely,

Charles Beresford

76: TO ?

[May 1907]

Dear ——,

You ask the following pertinent question: 'Why did we prior to 1905 spend five millions sterling annually in excess of the fighting requirements of the Navy?'

Answer. Because it's indelibly imprinted in the average, stupid, unthinking mind, just as it is imprinted in that of the average out-of-date retired Admiral and in the 'stupid party' in the Navy League, that fighting efficiency is inalienably associated with big Estimates! The exact opposite is the real truth! Lavish naval expenditure, like human high-living, leads to the development of latent parasitical bacilli which prey on and diminish the vitality of the belligerent force, whether in the human body or in the fighting ship!

The man gets the gout — the ship gets the rot! Instead of looking after herself, she runs to a Dockyard for everything, and the self-reliant instant readiness for war and conscious fighting efficiency are preyed upon by the harbour bacillus. (Fancy! seven Gothic churches have been built in the last few years (instead of battleships!) for the seamen, who were thus so much on shore when really they served God far better if kept at sea!) N.B. The Fleet, taken as a whole, is now 50 per cent more at sea than it was a short time ago (see enclosed print). Thank God, the churches are now empty! And so are the barracks, now we've got the Home Fleet!

ECONOMY SPELLS EFFICIENCY BECAUSE YOU GET THE UTMOST OUT OF EVERYTHING, AND THAT MAKES EVERYTHING BETTER!

When we began cross-examining naval expenditure two years ago, we went in minute detail through the whole 37 millions sterling of the Navy Estimates then being spent, and whoever had the spending of a single penny of it had to answer this question: 'Does the expenditure of that single blessed penny minister either directly or indirectly to the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war?' If the gentleman couldn't prove it did, it was ruthlessly cut out. One man kept 10,000 cane-bottomed chairs in stock ready for any emergency! A postcard to Maple & Co. would have brought a million of them by the next train.

The Navy Estimates exist to give us a fighting Navy and *nothing else!* To get a fighting Navy we must be ruthless, relentless, and remorseless in our Reforms. Parasites in the shape of non-fighting ships, non-combatant personnel, and unproductive shore expenditure must be extirpated like cancer — cut clean cut!

Yours,

J. A. Fisher

77: FROM THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Admiralty, Whitehall
June 8th, 1907

My dear Sir John,

I have very carefully read through the papers you gave me on Wednesday, and I must say I should regret that in their present form they should be circulated to the Board. No one is more alive to the objections which can be taken to much of the attitude taken up by Lord Charles Beresford and to his methods of action. I know him to be ambitious, self-advertising and gassy in his talk, but we all knew those bad qualities of his, and no one better than you, when you very wisely recommended his and Sir Reginald Custance's appointments. You and we then considered that some serious disadvantages were outweighed by the advantages which were to be gained by their good qualities and their record of services in the past.

Lord Charles has especially a large share of the good qualities. He is cheerful, active, zealous in the Service, and his power of attracting and enlisting the sympathies, abilities and affection of officers and men alike who are placed under him is remarkable. The fleet in the Mediterranean was got and left in a high state of efficiency.

These being the facts, it seems to be a pity to lodge a formal and so unqualified attack against him, which, if accepted, must almost forbid his continued employment. There must always be a good deal of difference of opinion as to the manner of administrating so great a business as the British Navy, and I feel very much the pressure of the responsibility which rests upon us all of consulting and conciliating the opinion of all whose experience qualifies them to form opinions on the subject, whether they are in exact accord with Admiralty Board views or not. It is after all only human to grind your own axe and to do what you can to get as much power and control over affairs as you can. Of course it is the duty of the Admiralty to put a severe limit on such aspirations. They have to consider the requirements of the whole Service in the largest manner and not the whims or ambitions of individual officers, but their opinions, whatever they may be, should be fully taken into account.

I am the last person in the world to abrogate one iota of the supremacy of the Board of Admiralty, but I do think we sometimes are inclined to consider our own views to be infallible and are not ready enough to give consideration to the views of others who may

disagree with us but who still give us ideas and information which can be turned to great use.

Believe me, Ever sincerely yours,

Tweedmouth

78: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Admiralty, Whitehall
June 9th, 1907

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

You will see by enclosed how Beresford is spreading his animadversions about his predecessor and the Admiralty broadcast. As Lord Clanwilliam said to me to-day, it's unprecedented! I hadn't had this letter when I saw him, but he was speaking of some announcement (in *The Times*, I think) of Beresford writing awarding praise to the authorities at Portsmouth at the creditable way they had effected repairs, as if he were the Admiralty! I can quite understand it is not easy for you to realize what these sort of things mean in the Service and how damaging to discipline. However, I hope to see you about it on Tuesday.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

79: TO CECIL FISHER

Buckingham Palace
July 14th, 1907

Dearest Cis,

. . . The King has asked me to his rooms at the Jockey Club at Newmarket on Wednesday, and I suppose I am going to the Races with His Majesty. He dines at Cassel's the night before, but he said he shouldn't have a chance of talking to me much there, so I had better come to him next day. I couldn't help thinking it a strange thing that the head butler took me into the room next the King's bedroom and said, 'The King will come and fetch you to breakfast himself,' and I sat in the ivory chair of the Great Mogul to wait, and the thought passed through my brain: '53 years ago you slept in the outfitter's attic at Portsmouth and didn't think then you'd come to a King fetching you to breakfast and sitting in the chair of the Great Mogul!' . . .

Your loving father,

J. F.

80: FROM ADMIRAL LORD CHARLES BERESFORD[1]

H.M.S. *Surprise*
Channel Fleet
July 16th, 1907

My dear Admiral,

. . . I have answered the First Lord's four questions and Admiralty letter.[2] The Admiralty evidently sees my points, and are doing what they can to meet my views, on those questions that I think weak, for defence of Home waters. They have given me what I asked for, and made it possible to have a Fleet ready in all its component parts and units for instant action. I can now make out a plan of campaign. ['We have never had it!' — J. F.] The only difference of importance that I see in my request and Admiralty offer is in three more unarmoured cruisers, a very important unit and one that should always be together, and a unit we are certainly weak in. I hope that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty will give me the three extra [ships]. ['The very day after getting all he asks for, he asks for three more.' — J. F.]

I am quite delighted with yours and the Admiralty letter. As I have written First Lord, the Board and myself can only have one object in view, the difference was how best to carry that object out.

Yours very sincerely,

Charles Beresford

81: TO J. L. GARVIN[3]

Admiralty, Whitehall
August 12th, 1907

Dear Garvin,

Do please reproduce, emphasize, and crystallize (in a letter to *The Times*, for example) those splendid words of yours, page 849,

[1] 'I suppose the King would like to see enclosed, which I suppose terminates the crisis, but even in this letter you see he asks for more' (Fisher to Knollys, July 22nd, 1907).

[2] Beresford's letter to the Admiralty (July 16th) is a good example of his saucy insubordination. Thus: 'With regard to question 3 ["Why not try and cultivate good and cordial relations between yourself and the Admiralty?"]. Are not the relations between myself and the Admiralty good and cordial? If, in presenting my views on a question of supreme importance bearing on the defence of the country, I appeared to be too drastic in my representations, it was owing to my anxiety at the danger of the situation, and, as their Lordships have accepted my point of view [!], it is unnecessary to pursue this matter further.' At about this time Beresford sent a telegram to Custance saying that he had brought the Admiralty to their bearings!

[3] J. L. Garvin, the brilliant political writer (and conversationalist!), on the political staff of the *Daily Telegraph* since 1899, Editor of the *Observer*, 1908-1942. Garvin was a sort of 'journalistic Fisher', which may explain why the Admiral had the greatest respect for and admiration of him. 'The divine fire burns in him' (Fisher to White, March 24th, 1907).

National Review (the top half of the page down to the word 'against'!).[1] I have had that bit reprinted and enclose it to everyone I write to, like a Pears' Soap advertisement! *But please do harden it home in your own inimitable language!* Also kindly mention at the same time what I asked Balfour to make a speech about — only he wouldn't! — 'that the primary virtue of a public servant is inconsistency,' and that 'inconsistency is the bugbear of weak minds,' and quote Tennyson with effect. John Burns spontaneously sent it to me the other day: I'll enclose a copy for you.[2]

What d—d fools we have to deal with! Neither Nelson nor St. Vincent, when in command at sea with their noble Fleets, could possibly possess the knowledge of the Admiralty octopus, with its antennae and its tentacles feeling everywhere and concentrating the knowledge in its brain. Just you read (no, I cut it out to send you!) the enclosed splendid letter from 'J. L.,' whoever he is (he's as good as the 'Bolt-from-the-Blue' man!).[3]

Don't you answer this. A sudden impulse seized me to write.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

According to David, we are in a bad way when all men speak well of us, so I don't repine at the most virulent abuse! '*The course of the ship is not altered*'! Remember the old women going to Tunis! '*Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*'

As I think I've told you, I have no politics! I've voted consistently for both sides and serve both sides so long as the Navy is kept unarguably predominant, for the British Empire floats on the British Navy and nothing else! And I assure you that if that ever [were] tampered with, I would go out into the wilderness.

'Sworn to no party, of no sect am I —
I can't be silent, and I will not lie!'

[1] This is the key sentence from the part of the article (Garvin: 'Mr. Chamberlain', *National Review*, August 1907) to which Fisher refers: 'Statesmen are constantly prevented by private honour and the public interest from using the arguments which would be most convincing, and they find themselves again and again compelled to defend proceedings which it is impossible for them to explain.'

[2] One still strong man in a blatant land
Whatever they call him, what care I?
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat, – one
Who can rule and dare not lie. – *Maud*

[3] 'J. L.' was John Leyland, Editor of the *Army and Navy Gazette*, 1904-1909. Fisher well knew who 'J. L.' was. He had thanked him, on August 12th, for his 'beauty' in that day's *Times* – a letter defending the Admiralty's Home Fleet policy and urging Englishmen to 'trust the experience of the sea officers at the Admiralty'.

82: TO KING EDWARD

Savoy Westend Hotel
Carlsbad
September 8th, 1907

Sir,

With my humble duty to Your Majesty I am availing myself of Your Majesty's gracious commands to write to you direct, as I think what I am going to say may be interesting to Your Majesty.

Isvolsky and Benckendorff[1] lunched with me yesterday and they were both very cordial and friendly, and we had an animated conversation on the meeting with the German Emperor at Swinemünde recently[2] and on the Hague Conference and on the Bagdad Railway and on the characteristics of the French and German Navies. It's not of course likely that these 'slim' Russians were going to say anything of value to a simple sailor, and Mrs. Francklin had warned me of the oriental magnificence to which lying had been brought in Russia. Nevertheless, there were 3 interesting things which almost seemed to slip inadvertently from Isvolsky to Benckendorff, *and not to me*, which struck me as might be of value to Your Majesty. Benckendorff said to Isvolsky something about the strength of German influence at Constantinople, and Isvolsky at once replied to him, '*It has greatly lessened during the last month and will continue to lessen.*'

About the Hague Conference, I said that Marischal must be a clever man, he has so completely annexed Choate,[3] if the newspapers are to be believed, and yet Choate swore to me he was heart and soul against floating mines, etc., etc. *Isvolsky*: 'Oh! Well, my own private opinion has always been — and (nodding to Benckendorff) he knows it — these war restrictions come to nothing when the time arrives.

[1] Alexander P. Izvolsky, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1906-1910; Count Alexander K. Benckendorff, Russian Ambassador at London, 1903-1916.

[2] The Emperor William, Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917), and their Foreign Ministers had met at Swinemünde, August 3rd-5th. There had been a discussion of the Bagdad Railway. German interests had since 1888 been constructing a railroad from a point opposite Constantinople to Bagdad (actually, to Basra, near the Persian Gulf). The Triple Entente powers were adamantly opposed to the whole project. At Swinemünde, too, the Russians had given assurances that any agreement they made with England (the Anglo-Russian Entente was signed on August 31st, 1907) would not be directed against Germany.

[3] Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, German Ambassador at Constantinople, 1897-1912, and principal German delegate to the second International Peace Conference at The Hague, June 15th-October 18th, 1907; Joseph H. Choate, head of the U.S. delegation to the Hague Conference. Of Marschall, Fisher later wrote (to White, May 21st, 1912): 'For years now I've been trying to make people in authority realize that he is the greatest man in Europe . . . He understands that Islam is the key of the British Empire and that Egypt is the key of Islam and Alexandria is the key of Egypt!'

You will be no loser.' I said, 'Think of the fearful blow to commerce of these deadly mines floating about the ocean, even as they are this moment off the Shantung promontory sinking ships so long after the War.' He said, 'Yes, but it makes that large mass of private interests more fearful of war and so tends for peace.' I said in reply ('*Loud Cheers*') that argument applies to our strong objection to make private property free from capture at sea, and he nodded his assent.

About the Bagdad Railway, he said to Benckendorff, 'Oh, it's endless years off, getting to the Persian Gulf,' and turning to me he said, 'It entirely rests with England,' but what he meant I don't quite know. However, I looked wise and said, wouldn't it be a good thing if it started from Mohammerum, being in Persian Territory, instead of Koweit, the present projected terminus of the railway in the Persian Gulf, which is Turkish territory? But he didn't rise to that. He said the German Emperor had greatly impressed them at Swinemünde, and also the efficiency of the German Navy. 'What did I think of the German and French Navies?' I told him what Widenmann, the German Naval Attaché [1907-1912] had said to me, that their crews were too raw for modern complexities, however splendid their discipline, for one third of the crew are from the plough's tail, one third only 2 years' service, and the other third not very experienced either, so that every ship is in reality only just getting efficient when they are dispersed after 3 years' service. As to the French, I said I feared that discipline had deteriorated, but it was a splendid Navy nevertheless and not open to the discredit now being cast upon it by the French nationalist Press. Isvolsky said they were greatly exercised as to their new type of battleship. I said we didn't want anyone to copy the *Dreadnought* and would be very glad to be left out in the cold with them! So I didn't wish to recommend her as a type to him!

Isvolsky has a pretty wit — that Polish Countess walked past us in the restaurant while at lunch (I haven't yet got her name right), and he seemed greatly taken with her, and she turned round and smiled on me, so he said, 'There will be no women in Heaven!' And I replied, 'Well, I don't want to be there in that case, but why do you say so?' 'Well,' he said, 'it is related by St. John in the Apocalypse that there was a great silence in Heaven for half an hour, and if only one single woman there it would have been an impossibility!'[1] . . .

[1] When Fisher met Izvolsky, he got him to write his name and title in Russian on a small card as a souvenir. On the back Izvolsky pencilled in English: 'I knew only one woman who could understand reason, and she would not listen to it.'

I hope, Sir, that I have not wearied Your Majesty with so long a letter, which I think had best go in the fire when Your Majesty has read it.[1] The Grand Duke Michael gave me the pin out of his own scarf as he said good-bye to me this morning, and the Grand Duchess was very kind to me. I don't wonder that her nickname in Russia is 'Sunshine'![2]

With my humble duty to Your Majesty,
I am Your Majesty's obedient servant,

J. A. Fisher

83: TO SIR GEORGE CLARKE

Carlsbad
September 12th, 1907

My dear Clarke,

I have just had sent to me the article in *The Times* of September 10 by its Military Correspondent (Colonel A'Court Repington) [1904-1918] in which the Invasion Bogey is once more resuscitated and once more to be re-laid, I hope, by a similarly delightful letter by 'Student' [Clarke] as appeared in *The Times* of March 29, 1907, on the 'Bolt-out-of-the-Blue School,' which evidently hit Repington hard, as he alludes to the 'Black Treachery School' with obvious bitterness. Another (but I should say myself the same) most able and acute pen, under the signature of 'Navalis,' on September 4th, 1906, and on October 9th, 1906, again stabbed Repington under the fifth rib in asking when last England was invaded, and why, and stating the amazing thing to his (Navalis's) mind that while no one would adduce the purely military proposals of an Admiral as a serious argument, the naval proposals of a General should be preferred to the continuous teaching of centuries of naval history! In this letter I have just read Repington calmly and with cool insistence dictates to the Admiralty what the naval arrangements should be to render the problem of invasion impossible, and has the audacity to

[1] But the King found Fisher's conversation with 'the astute Russian Diplomats most remarkable and full of interest and importance' (King Edward to Fisher, September 13th, 1907).

[2] The Grand Duke Michael and the Grand Duchess Olga were the Tsar's only brother and his younger sister. Fisher gave her dancing lessons, which he hoped would 'tend to increase the "Entente", and I ought to get something out of the Foreign Office for it' (Fisher to Tweedmouth, September 1st, 1907). See further on the dancing lessons and related matters, the amusing account in *Memories*, pp. 231-3.

make absolutely unfounded statements implying that the responsibility of directing the Naval Force of this country is distributed 'amongst several semi-independent Sea Wardens round the Coast'! and that the Naval Force permanently stationed in Home Waters is inadequate to cope with the German Fleet. Why, the whole business of the Admiralty for the last three years has been to concentrate our Sea Force in such a preponderating mass in Home Waters as absolutely to preclude the faintest possibility of an invasion or even of a raid!

But I began my letter to you with quite a different object than this tirade against Repington. It was to express to you my humble appreciation of your very excellent note criticising the statement of the 'Committee of Four' (Lord Roberts, Lord Lovat, Sir Samuel Scott,[1] and Colonel A'Court Repington), who called on Mr. Balfour to raise again the Invasion Question, which we all thought had been laid aside for ever by his, Mr. Balfour's, memorable State Paper when presiding over the Committee of Imperial Defence as Prime Minister.[2]

As you well say in summarizing the extreme assumptions made, 'It is practically inconceivable that these successive operations (leading to an invasion) could all be accomplished within the times stated unless there were no British warships in the North Sea, and except on this hypothesis the expeditionary force would be exposed to delay or disaster during a period of about 48 hours . . . thus invasion in force would have no reasonable chance of success and would incur the most tremendous risks (as so powerfully described by Mr. Balfour in his State Paper) unless the British Fleet were absent from the North Sea during the time required' (*which I may say authoritatively it never can be!*).

As has been ably pointed out by the Director of Naval Intelligence, 'No one outside the secret offices of the Board of Admiralty can possess the elements of a judgment on the momentous problems involved in the naval defence of the Eastern Littoral of these Islands against an over-sea invasion. For a military officer, however able,

[1] Captain (afterwards Major) Sir Samuel Scott, sixth Baronet; Lieutenant-Colonel (afterwards Major-General) the fourteenth Baron Lovat, neither on active service at this date; Field-Marshal (ret.) the first Earl Roberts, onetime Commander-in-Chief of the Army (1901-1904), and acknowledged leader of the 'Bolt-from-the-Blue School'. Roberts had resigned from the Committee of Imperial Defence in November 1905 to devote himself to the cause of a great army for home defence, to be supplied by national service.

[2] See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 367, n. 69. Balfour, feeling that a *prima facie* case had been made out by the four, wanted the invasion question to be re-examined by a C.I.D. sub-committee. This was decided upon at the end of August over Fisher's violent opposition.

to pronounce a categorical opinion upon this maritime question is therefore not less absurd than it would be for the First Sea Lord to write for Mr. Balfour's perusal a note criticizing in a similar strain the adequacy of the British military dispositions against invasion on the North West Frontier of India. The exact rendezvous of the various divisions of the British Fleet in Home Waters, the nature of the telegraphic orders it will receive, the positions at which during a period of strained relations the flotillas of destroyers and submarines will be found are matters on which no information is ever likely to be available to outsiders. It is the *Admiralty's* business to decide and to keep its own counsel in such matters.'

Your arguments are incapable of disproof, but supposing they were, then it would *not* be a question of spending more millions on Military Defence but on the contrary to add new battleships and flotillas to the Navy.

As 'Student' said, 'We have a Navy almost on a Three-Power Standard . . . our Military expenditure is 40 per cent greater than before the South African War. If nevertheless it is asserted at brief intervals that our huge defence charges do not suffice to secure us against hourly danger of the most appalling character, then we may confidently expect the natural and inevitable results. The time will come when the majority of the voters — our Masters — will say "you can agree upon nothing: you are never satisfied, however much you spend you are always discovering new dangers; we prefer to accept risks rather than fling more money into the pit which — on your own showing — is bottomless".'

I hope as your last salute before leaving England[1] you will fire a broadside at Repington that will sink him! . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Clarke had been appointed Governor of Bombay on July 19th. He was succeeded as Secretary of the C.I.D. by Ottley on August 24th, a change for which Fisher had been working for some time. '. . . grieved of course still about Clarke not going, but I promise you to make the best of it . . . Part of my disappointment is that Ottley would be so *very excellent* in Clarke's place – a great loss to me personally at the Admiralty, but he is THE man for that place and, thank God, in the Navy we have literally scores to choose from to take Ottley's place' (Fisher to Esher, August 19th, 1906).

84: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Carlsbad
September 12th, 1907

Dear Esher,

. . . I really can't understand Mr. Buckle giving Repington his head in this way in the columns of *The Times*! but I suppose it 'catches on' and makes the flesh creep of the '*old women of both sexes*' (as Lord St. Vincent called the 'Invasion lot' in his day!),[1] and his memorable saying so infinitely more true now than then. When asked his opinion of the possibility of an invasion, he replied 'that if considered as a purely military operation he was loth to offer an opinion, but he certainly could positively state it could never take place by sea!'

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

85: TO KING EDWARD

Carlsbad
September 14th, 1907

Sir,

. . . the Bishops are short-sighted idiots to set themselves against the undoubted will of the Country as to the Deceased Wife's Sister business. Mr. Birrell[2] was quite right — he said he had searched English History in vain to find the Clergy of the Established Church on any one single occasion on the side of reform!

Isvolsky came up to me yesterday and gave me the enclosed sheet of the *Neue Freie Presse*, which he described to me as a most influential paper, and he said the account of his interview was substantially correct, so I enclose it for Your Majesty's perusal. I can't read German, but he gave me a short précis of it and said he was proud of saying a lot without meaning anything! I was very much amused at his asking me if I could tell him anything confidentially about the Hague Conference and when it would finish, considering Nelidoff,

[1] Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St. Vincent, when First Lord of the Admiralty (1801-1804), had made this celebrated remark on the occasion of the threatened invasion by Napoleon's Boulogne flotilla, 1803-1804.

[2] Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1907-1916; the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act, which had become law on August 28th, declared marriages between a man and his deceased wife's sister legal.

the Russian Delegate, is the President of the Conference! I had quite a long conversation with him and he is extremely cordial and friendly and he did say one thing with emphasis to me, 'that by next year he felt sure Russia would have settled down a great deal and this would admit of more cordiality between Russia and England being openly manifested.' . . .

I also enclose an interesting bit of *The Times* in case Your Majesty has overlooked it, and Drury[1] writes to me to the same effect of the recrudescence of the old feeling of regard and trust in England on the part of the Turks, or I suppose one ought to say the Sultan. My humble opinion is that it will be a Master Stroke if Your Majesty visits the Sultan next Easter, provided the Emperor of Russia knows Your Majesty is going to see him also. No doubt the diplomatists and the Christian fanatics may be against it, but it mostly happens in the big things of the world that neither diplomatists or Christians are large-minded. . . .

I am, Sir, Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

86: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Carlsbad
September 18th, 1907

My blessed E.,

This is not the letter you are going to get in about a week's time, when I propose descanting for your benefit on the silly louts who are talking of invasion now; the second part of the coming letter on the sillier louts who are writing that British naval supremacy is gone, etc. They will be swallowed up like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram when the dramatic moment arrives. Moses is getting all ready for them. (I am Moses!) . . . I've written the most savage letter to Tweedmouth, who wants a compromise. I DETEST compromises! and I've told him so.

Yours for ever,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Admiral Drury had succeeded Beresford as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1907-1908.

87: TO JOHN LEYLAND

Hotel Molveno
Molveno [South Tyrol]
September 22nd, 1907

My dear Leyland,

Your letter just came — VERY WELCOME.

(1) I had no idea of the French Naval Scheme of Education till you told me. No doubt I've had the papers, but no time to look at them. It is indeed a wonderful compliment to our new scheme of Naval Education that the French Navy should have adopted it *en bloc.*

(2) I am extremely gratified by your taking up the cudgels as 'Navarchus.' I hope your letter may appear.[1] I don't really want to flatter you, but C. N. Robinson of *Times*[2] and myself, when talking of you a little time ago, thought your pen better qualified for this 'invasion' campaign than either 'Navalis' or 'J. R. T.' [Thursfield]. 'Navalis' not quite sound about the Home Fleet and is playing up to Beresford being made 'Admiralissimo,' which means the Admiralty abdicating its functions and trusting a man who I KNOW has not the genius of Wilson for *strategy* and would not (*I am sure*) be equal to the task. Besides, it's not *one* man's place any more than it was Togo's! and 'J. R. T.', fond as I am of him, is getting very prosy of late and does not smite as he should!

'And Elisha said unto the King of Israel, "*Smite* [upon the ground]." And he smote thrice, and *stayed.* And the Man of God was wroth with him and said, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times — then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst CONSUMED IT" '![3]

As Mahan said in a famous passage: Don't be ever satisfied with simple victory, but *batter, blast, pulverize, annihilate your enemy*, whether on paper or with battleships! (Not his words but what he meant to say!!!)

You know Admiral Yamamoto was Minister of Marine in Japan for 8 years and during the War. He and I lately arranged all that

[1] Leyland's 'Blue Water School' letter (published on September 18th) ripped to shreds the 'bogey' of the 'Bolt-from-the-Blue School'.

[2] Commander (ret.) Charles N. Robinson, on the staff of *The Times*, 1895-1936, responsible for the collection of day-to-day naval news (by 1914 he shared with Thursfield the title of *The Times* Naval Correspondent), later Editor of *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1929-1936. 'He is not Mr. Buckle, the Editor of *The Times*, but he is the man whom Buckle thinks aloud to. He is a man of integrity, a thorough gentleman . . .' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, February 12th, 1910).

[3] 2 Kings, xiii, 18-19.

our joint Navies are to do in case of war. We had three long private interviews of three hours each, we two alone. I said to him: 'Admiral! Tell me, is it true that you made Togo Commander-in-Chief only a few weeks before war broke out, superseding the man of your own choice and who had done excellently as Commander-in-Chief, and why did you do it?' — *swopping horses while crossing the river* (he understood and knew Lincoln's famous saying!). He replied: 'Because at the last moment I felt Togo was a little bit better than my friend, and when a Fleet is worked up as our Fleet was and yours is, the change of Commander-in-Chief is not what it was in Nelson's day.' This was the spirit of his answer. Then I said, 'Did Togo act on his own initiative?' He replied, '*Never*. I gave him orders for every movement that occurred; *everything was directed from the Admiralty*, but, of course, the final issue rested with him in bringing on the battle and fighting it out. Superior speed gave him his victory'!

I think, my dear Leyland, you will find all this as interesting and illuminating and common-sensical as I did! It won't do for you to quote *verbatim et literatim*, but you can write feeling you walk on firm ground.

Private. Repington came to me some time ago with a most insidious proposal to help the 'compulsory service' agitation by giving some sort of encouragement to the 'Blue Funk School'. I said to him: '*Vade retro, Satanas*,' and he bolted! It's a purely party move, or rather that is what it is degenerating into. . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

88: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Molveno
September 28th, 1907

My dear Corbett,

. . . That 'Repairs Print' you speak so kindly of is about the best thing I have ever had to do with, and yet isn't it sad that only you and one other at all appreciate it! With all my colleagues it has been 'still-born.' *Isn't it curious?* Robertson, M.P., who has really an acute brain, thinks nothing of it, and all the rest can't make out for the life of them why it was written!!! These are the disappointments of your

life. What one thinks and *knows* to be one's very best, to be thought nothing of! So your letter was as the 'balm of Gilead' on that point.

However, I don't know that I should have bored you with another letter but for the other precious part of your letter — your new book[1] and your remarks on the re-raised 'Invasion Bogey'. Wouldn't it be a fine thing for you to have an article in the *Nineteenth Century* (Knowles[2] would jump at it if I mentioned it to him, *I am sure*, and I would gladly do so with your permission), because it would accentuate your book when it came out, and it would be peculiarly appropriate if it appeared in November, as the matter is then coming before us at the Defence Committee, to be, I hope, finally set at rest. At all events, Repington and Co. will assuredly be at it again soon, and anyhow it's the sort of subject dear to the British Public to get a sort of shiver of the German Host upon them and then to feel the returning warmth of security and bliss in finding that 40 million Pomeranian Grenadiers can't be landed in five minutes! (Here's a hint for your consideration *en passant.*) It's really a masterpiece of 'funk' the paper prepared for the Defence Committee by Repington and his co-adjutors, Lord Roberts, Lord Lovat, etc., who are simply putty in Repington's hands. The miles of railway sidings at Hamburg, Bremen, etc., have all been worked out, the wharfage and shipping and entraining and detraining of Army Corps all set forth from official German sources, and your blood quite creeps, *but not one blessed word* of the British Navy — our now permanent, fully manned North Sea Fleet — only a veiled, insolent untruth in the allusion you seize upon to 'the four semi-independent Sea-Wardens round the coast'! I think you would trot this out so beautifully and effectively. But don't you bother to answer or even consider this proposal as to the *Nineteenth Century* unless the idea rushes at you[3]. . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Corbett's *England in the Seven Years' War.*

[2] Sir James Knowles, founder, proprietor, and Editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, 1877-1908.

[3] It did not, and Fisher replied (October 10th): 'As usual your letter excellent and convinces me, and you are so right not to smite unless you smite utterly . . . Pen or sword, it's not *victory* we want but *annihilation*!'

89: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Molveno
October 1st, 1907

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . I don't agree with Fawkes[1] one bit (*and never have*) as to drawing on Australians or the necessity of many cruisers. His position on both points is utterly untenable, and I hope to prove this to your satisfaction, as I did to both Lord Cawdor and Lord Selborne. The Colonies one and all grab all they possibly can out of us and give us nothing back. *They are all alike!* . . .

I think we shall have after all to issue the suspended minute of the Board, as Beresford returns to the charge that he '*is responsible for the Fleet in Home Waters*' in what I call a *very impertinent* remark to the Board of Admiralty in paragraph 4 of his letter of August 28, No. 1023/5098:—'I note that their Lordships consider that the Admiral who in war is responsible for the Fleet in Home Waters should not press his opinion as to its efficiency in time of peace.' To my mind this sort of official language is intolerable. The Military Correspondent of *The Times* is in obvious collusion with him, but I hope we shall give him a 'facer'!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

90: TO KING EDWARD

Molveno
October 4th, 1907

Sir,

With my humble duty to Your Majesty, I have just received Reich's book from Davidson[2] with Your Majesty's commands to me to submit my remarks thereon from a naval point of view.

On naval points the book is one unmitigated mass of misrepresentations, not redeemed by even *one* particle of truth! In March this

[1] Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Wilmot Fawkes, Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Squadron, 1905-1908.

[2] *Germany's Swelled Head* (1907), by Dr. Emil Reich, historian and frequent lecturer at Oxford, Cambridge, and London universities; Colonel Sir Arthur Davidson, an assistant private secretary to King Edward, 1901-1910.

year *it is an absolute fact* that Germany had not laid down a single Dreadnought, nor had she commenced building a single big ship for 18 months (*Germany has been paralysed by the Dreadnought!*). The more the German Admiralty looked into her qualities, the more convinced they became that they must follow suit, and the more convinced they were that the whole of their existing Battle Fleet was utterly useless *because utterly wanting in gun power!* (Half of their whole Battle Fleet are only equal to our armoured cruisers!) The German Admiralty wrestled with the Dreadnought problem for 18 months and did nothing. *Why?* Because it meant spending 12½ millions sterling on widening and deepening the Kiel Canal and in dredging all their harbours and all the approaches to their harbours, because if they did not do so it would be no use building German Dreadnoughts, because they couldn't float anywhere in the harbours of Germany! *But there was another reason never yet made public.* Our *existing* battleships of the latest type draw too much water to get close into the German waters,[1] but the German Admiralty is going (is *obliged*) to spend 12½ millions sterling [in dredging] to allow our existing ships to go and fight them! It was a Machiavellian interference of Providence on our behalf that brought about the evolution of the *Dreadnought*!

To return to Mr. Reich. As I mentioned just now to Your Majesty, he makes the flesh creep of the British Public at page 78 *et sequitur* by saying what the Germans *are going to do*. He doesn't say what *they* have *not* done and what *we have* done!

England has 7 Dreadnoughts and 3 'Invincibles' (in my opinion better than Dreadnoughts), total — *10* Dreadnoughts built and building, *while Germany in March last had not begun one*! even if in May last a German Dreadnought had been commenced! You will see, Sir, from this *one fact* alone what a liar Mr. Reich is! Again, at page 86, he makes out the Germans are stronger in torpedo craft, etc. 'As a protection against the possible attacks of such a German force, Great Britain maintains in the North Sea only 24 fully commissioned destroyers.' What are the facts as stated in an *Admiralty official document* dated August 22nd, 1907? 'We have 123 destroyers and 40 submarines; the Germans have 48 destroyers and *one* submarine.' The whole of our destroyers and submarines are *absolutely efficient and ready for instant battle* and are fully manned (except a portion of the destroyers which have 4/5ths of their crew), and they are all constantly being exercised.

[1] After which he added in his *Memories*, p. 15: '(we have to build ours big to go all over the world with great fuel endurance)'.

But there is one more private piece of information for Your Majesty alone. Admiral Tirpitz (the German Minister of Marine) [1897-1916] has privately stated in a secret paper that the English Navy is *now* four times stronger than the German Navy! *And we are going to keep the British Navy at that strength. Vide* 10 Dreadnoughts built and building and not one German Dreadnought last March! But we don't want to parade all this, because if so we shall have Parliamentary trouble. Sir John Brunner, M.P., and *150* Members of the House of Commons who are Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's warmest supporters and have been his steadfast friends in adversity have sent him quite recently one of the best papers I have read, convincingly showing that we don't want to lay down any new ships at all — *we are so strong*. It is quite true! Sir Charles Dilke in the *United Service Magazine* for October 1907 (*this month*) says, 'Sir George Clarke points out *that the Navy is now* (*Oct. 1907*) *stronger than at any previous time in history*,' and he adds that Sir George Clarke in making this printed statement in his recently published book[1] makes it with full knowledge of all the secrets of the Government as to our own and foreign naval strength, because as Secretary to the Imperial Defence Committee he has access to every bit of information that exists! In conclusion I entreat Your Majesty to read a letter in *The Times* [September 17th] by Mr. Gerard Fiennes[2] (which I attach). He greatly understates the case, as the *Home Fleet* is *25 per cent* stronger than he puts it. As regards Mr. Reich's naval statements, they are a simple *réchauffé* of the mendacious drivel of that 'halfpenny rag', the *Daily Express* (see page 83 and other pages where Mr. Reich quotes it, and *no other authority* is quoted in his book!).

When Your Majesty backed up the First Sea Lord against unanimous Naval feeling against the *Dreadnought* — when she was first designed — and when Your Majesty launched her, went to sea in her, witnessed her battle practice (which surpassed all records), it just simply shut up the mouths of the revilers as effectively as those lions were kept from eating Daniel! *And they would have eaten me but for Your Majesty!*

I got this letter last night (Providence sent it to me because I was writing to Your Majesty!). The writer says to me apropos of the virulent and persistent attacks of the *Standard* and *Daily Express* (they

[1] The second edition (1907) of Clarke's *Fortification: Its Past Achievements, Recent Development, and Future Progress*, which was first published in 1890.

[2] Gerard Fiennes, the naval journalist, who was to become one of the Admiral's most devoted allies in the press.

belong to one and the same owner),[1] and of Your Majesty's inspection of the Home Fleet and the gracious words in Your Majesty's speech proroguing Parliament: 'Mr. Gwynne (the Editor of the *Standard* [1904-1911]) told me that the Home Fleet Review had knocked the bottom out of their case, and also that he is bitterly disgusted with Beresford for having accepted his two armoured cruisers and 24 destroyers and not resigned his command of the Channel Fleet as he had led his journalistic friends to think he would do.'

Sir, that is a nice exposé of our chief Admiral afloat in collusion with an organized journalistic attack on the Board of Admiralty. I wrote the other day to Lord Tweedmouth about an official letter from Lord Charles Beresford, that has been received since I came on leave, that I desired to inform him as First Lord that the position is becoming intolerable and when I get back, subject of course to Your Majesty's previous approval (for I will *never* take any such serious step *without Your Majesty's full approval*), I intend to bring the matter to a direct issue at a meeting of the Board and flatten out Beresford once and for all. Lambton said to me the other day, '*Seize Beresford by the scruff of the neck and he will collapse like every Irishman who ever breathed — he is a blusterer.*'

I don't mean to say, Sir, that we are not menaced by Germany. *Her diplomacy is and has been infinitely superior to ours!* Observe our treatment of the Sultan as compared with Germany! *The Sultan is the most important personage to England in the whole world!* Mr. Choate swore to me before going to the Hague Conference how he would side with England over submarine mines and other matters, but Germany has collared the United States absolutely at The Hague! The only *one* thing in the world that England has to fear is Germany and the United States *combining* against England, and the Hague Conference and the Algeciras Conference over Morocco [1906] brought them nearer than ever before. Our United States Attaché[2] told me the German Emperor is *perpetually* sending presents to all the American Admirals, and that the German Embassy at Washington was far and away in the ascendant with the President and the Senators and the Congressmen, as it was always looking after 'their sisters and their cousins and their aunts'! and money flowed like water in both direct and indirect channels to increase German influence. The German Army and the American Navy would certainly make it hot for us,

[1] Cyril A. Pearson (afterwards first Baronet), proprietor of the *Daily Express* (which he had founded), 1900-1912, and the *Standard*, 1904-1910.

[2] Captain (afterwards Admiral) Frank E. C. Ryan, Naval Attaché in Washington, 1905-1907.

but even then we are equal to the German and American Navies combined, and with a margin!

I hope Your Majesty won't think me very presumptuous, as I humbly confess I am neither a diplomatist nor a politician (I thank God I am neither — the former are senile and the latter are liars, as a rule), but it all does seem such simple common sense that for our Army we require mobile troops as against sedentary garrisons — that our intervention in [a] Continental struggle by regular land warfare is impracticable, and combined naval and military expeditions must be directed by us against the outlying possessions of the enemy, or, in the splendid words of Sir E. Grey, 'The British Army is a projectile to be fired by the Navy.' The foundation of our policy is that the communications of the Empire must be kept open by a *predominant Fleet*, and *ipso facto* such a Fleet will suffice to allay the fears of the old women of both sexes in regard to the invasion of England or her *island* colonies, for whenever the United States wants to annex Canada she can do it, for no earthly power (not the world in arms!) could prevent the 70 millions of the United States accomplishing this on a land frontier extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and Europe 3,000 miles away — and the limitless internal resources of the United States. (When I was Commander-in-Chief in North America, I sent secretly an experienced naval constructor to visit the American shipyards on the Lakes, and he reported that they could build and arm men-of-war for service on the Lakes and in the River St. Lawrence in one hundred days in almost any numbers and could improvise the trading vessels on the Lakes at once for the service in almost limitless numbers, and yet there are thousands of foolish people in England who talk of throwing in our lot with Canada against the United States!) . . .

I hope Your Majesty will forgive me if I have written too much. It is *trop de zèle*! I have the honour to be

Your Majesty's humble servant,

J. A. Fisher

91: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Molveno
October 7th, 1907

My beloved E.,

Just got your letter![1] It's my unalterable conviction that, *whatever* you advise, *whatever* you do, *whatever* you say, ALL is dictated by the sole desire of keeping me in the straight and narrow way (however, I have a 'penchant' for the other road!), so you can lecture me, blackguard me, revile me to the utmost. I shall always be taking it 'lying down' from you (but I am going to kick other people's shins if they kick mine!). '*Death found him fighting.*' What a glorious epitaph! One of Nelson's Captains.

But I don't care what you say, my unalterable conviction is that the Committee of Imperial Defence is tending rapidly to become a sort of Aulic Council,[2] and the men who talk glibly and write 'Clarke-ly' and argue Haldane-ly (*bless him!* this no disparagement of him!) — these men will usurp the functions of the *two* men who MUST be the '*Masters of the War*' — the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the General Staff. Make no mistake. I don't mean those men are to be dictators, but the Cabinet says and the King approves: '*Do so and so!*' *These are the two Executive Officers and may be* (as in the case of Sir F. Richards),[3] they may be utterly incompetent to take part in a discussion. Richards was Moses and always had to have an Aaron with him! *but his judgment was unerring and incomparable*, but he NEVER could tell the Cabinet his reasons for any single thing. Just you ask Mr. Balfour or Sir Michael Hicks-Beach[4] or Lord Spencer! (What stories they could tell you!) But Richards was always right, although dear old Sir Vernon Harcourt[5] turned him inside out and drove old Richards into a state of frenzied exasperation. Nevertheless, he,

[1] Esher's letter of October 1st (*Esher*, II, 249) had spanked Fisher hard for his hostile attitude towards the renaissance of the invasion scare and towards the Committee of Imperial Defence, which was preparing to investigate the problem again. 'It is the discussions which keep alive popular fears and popular interest, upon which alone rest the Navy Estimates. A nation that believes itself secure, all history teaches is doomed . . . An invasion Scare is the mill of God which grinds you out a Navy of Dreadnoughts, and keeps the British people war-like in spirit. So do not be scornful, and sit not with Pharisees!'

[2] The Aulic Council was the supreme tribunal of the Holy Roman Empire (1501-1806), from which there was no appeal.

[3] Admiral of the Fleet (ret.) Sir Frederick Richards, onetime First Sea Lord (1893-1899).

[4] Hicks-Beach, then first Viscount (afterwards first Earl) St. Aldwyn, onetime Chancellor of the Exchequer (1895-1902).

[5] Sir William Vernon Harcourt (d. 1904), onetime Chancellor of the Exchequer (1892-1895).

Harcourt, did what Richards said ought to be done. *Why?* Because he, Richards (as every First Sea Lord must do), knew the '*innards*' of every detail of war, and war is a case of *one* man and *one* mind and ONE voice![1]

Pray, what are you going to do with this [C.I.D.] Sub-Committee presided over by my dear idolized friend Mr. Morley? That d—d Sea Lawyer, Sir William Beelzebub[2] (Mr. Haldane and his friends call him 'Old Nick,' I believe! He'll sell them all. He's *hairy about the hocks!*), will trot out reams of foolscap and miles of railway sidings at Hamburg and Bremen, and millions of German soldiers who can get in and out of a train in 5 seconds, but what the hell does he know about the Navy or invasion? NOTHING! However, my name is Easy.[3] My occultation is near at hand! Beresford and Bellairs are going to be First Sea Lord and Parliamentary Secretary of the Admiralty, and there's a statue to Beresford at the Hippodrome (draped! because of his modesty!), and Bellairs is allowed to lie without stint. How curious both their initials are C. B.! Perhaps they think someone might mistake them! If I was the Prime Minister, I should change my initials.

Yours till death,

J. F.

Very lovely place — the colouring is really not exaggerated. N. B. Don't send me a telegram of joy on getting this letter, as it takes a mule 5 hours to get here with it and takes 10 crowns out of my pocket! The postmaster lives 3 miles up a precipice. When handed a telegram the other day for England, he looked in a map of China for it and, not finding it there, he looked in Africa! Perhaps he's a prophet and foresees the future of our beloved Country lies on the Yangtze and the Zambesi and the Nile. The Navy can get there all right! . . .

[1] See Esher's blistering reply of October 15th to this paragraph, in *Esher*, II, 251-2. The gist is in this excerpt: 'Your pitfall is that you want to carry your *one man rule* from War into Peace, and all history shows the fatal track along which *One Man* has walked to disaster . . . Sir John Fisher – if he were less obstinate – would fasten on the Defence Committee as his sheet anchor . . . I hope to transact with you on these lines; you will back the Defence Committee for all you are worth in *Peace*, on the condition that its doors are locked, and the key in your pocket, in *War*.'

[2] General Sir William (afterwards Field-Marshal, first Baron) Nicholson, Quartermaster-General, 1905-1907, and a member of the C.I.D. Sub-Committee on Invasion. Fisher and Nicholson had an antipathy towards each other since their clashes at the time of the Esher Committee.

[3] Easy, in Captain Marryat's famed novel, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836), tells Donna Agnes her fortune – accurately.

In regard to the 'Invasion Bogey' about which I am now writing to you, how curious it is that from the German Emperor downwards their hearts were stricken with fear that WE were going to attack them . . . Here is an interview between Beit and the German Emperor given me at first hand, immediately on Beit's return from Berlin.[1]

Beit: 'Your Majesty is very greatly mistaken in supposing that any feeling exists in England for war with Germany. I know both Mr. Balfour and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman are absolutely averse to any such action. I know this of my own personal knowledge.'

The Emperor: 'Yes, yes, but it doesn't matter whether either of them is Prime Minister or what party is in power. *Fisher remains! that's the vital fact!* I admire Fisher. I say nothing against him. If I were in his place I should do all that he has done (in concentrating the British Navy against Germany) and I should do all that *I know* he has it in his mind to do. Isvolsky, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, holds the same opinion.'

And yet Mr. Leo Maxse gibbets Sir John Fisher every month in the *National Review* as a traitor to his country and a panderer to Germany, and who 'ought to be hung at his own yard arm!' and the modern Major Dalgetty of Sir Walter Scott's novel[2] (Colonel A'Court Repington, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*), who, as Sir George Clarke writes to me a fortnight ago, having fought on one side, now fights on the other and is now the chosen apostle lying on Mr. Leo Maxse's bosom in this month's *National Review*! What a queer world we do live in!!! . . .

Please arrange a dinner at Carlton on Sunday, October 27, with our beloved friend F. K. [Knollys], and we will give him a bottle of claret 300 years old! *Don't forget this, and send him my fondest love. . . .*

[1] The conversation between the Emperor and Alfred Beit, a prominent South African business man (d. July 1906), had taken place in January 1906. Beit had reported it to Esher, who passed its substance on to the King in a memorandum of January 18th, 1906 (*Esher*, II, 136-9), and to Fisher, in abbreviated form, in a letter (cited without date in Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 72). Apparently Fisher, too, had seen Beit.

[2] Captain Dugald Dalgetty, in Scott's *Legend of Montrose*, a soldier of fortune, a pedant, and a braggart, but not untrustworthy if well paid.

92: TO THE PRINCE OF WALES

Lido Palace Hotel
Riva [South Tyrol]
October 16th, 1907

Sir,

I have not plagued Your Royal Highness with my writing for a long time, but I've finished a revise of a print on the re-raised invasion scare which is being engineered by the Military Correspondent of *The Times* (Colonel A'Court Repington), a sort of Major Dalgetty (ready to fight on either side).

Sir George Clarke tells me that not many months ago Repington wrote to him exactly the opposite, but he has now thrown in his lot with Lord Roberts, Lord Lovat, and others who think this mischievous agitation will help them with 'compulsory service,' which is only another name for conscription *and which the Country will never swallow*. The cleverest words I have read lately are sent me by Fritz Ponsonby. I hope Your Royal Highness will permit me to repeat them: 'My point is, if we are not safe from invasion, then make us so. Spend money on submarines, destroyers, etc., but don't waste money on an armed mob. You might as well arm all the caretakers in London houses with a revolver instead of supplying a police force! *Why wait till the enemy has landed?* However, in order to create a large reserve for great emergencies and in order to prevent a panic, it may be necessary to have a territorial army — *but do it as cheaply as possible.*'[1] I think, Sir, that is about as lucid an exposition as I have ever read, and goes to the root of the silliness of the invasion scare party, who want a big Army, because *that is what is really being aimed at!*

I see the French Admiral Germinet[2] has been disparaging the *Dreadnought*. As I wrote to a friend, it reminds me of the French proverb:

> 'Si on n'a pas ce qu'on aime
> Il faut aimer ce qu'on a.'

The poor French are all over the place, for which I am very sorry — their personnel, their discipline, their powder, and their ship-designing and their dockyards all adrift, but, saddest of all, *their nurseries*. The Germans are adding a million babies every year, while with the French it's a minus quantity!

[1] The exclamation point and italics (underlining) were Fisher's.
[2] Vice-Admiral Paul-Louis Germinet, Commander-in-Chief of the French Mediterranean Fleet, 1907-1909.

Sir, the German Admiralty has wrestled for 1½ years with the Dreadnought problem, trying to evade it by smaller ships and mixed armament, and, having been paralysed for 18 months, they have swallowed her whole! Admiral Germinet is an ass in trying to comfort his countrymen in this way. When the fox lost his tail in Aesop's fable, he tried to persuade all the other foxes to lose their tails. . . .

With my humble duty to Your Royal Highness, I remain Your Royal Highness's obedient servant,

J. A. Fisher

93: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Grand Hotel Neues Kurhaus
Levico
October 17th, 1907

My beloved Friend,

. . . As to your suggestion in regard to C. I. D.,[1] it is very cogently put and I should have no misgivings if you would kindly arrange for me to succeed Clarke at once, but my feeling is one of anxiety that the C. I. D. will usurp fighting functions in the gradual accession of potent means of coercing the First Sea Lord and whoever the gentleman is at the War Office who will be dictator in war as regards the land forces. Even my trusted Ottley doesn't know things I have up my sleeve, but wait till you get a further print now in the press for my colleagues, which will convince you how more essential than ever it is that we should not set up an Aulic Council in the shape of the C. I. D.!

Yours till death,

J. F.

94: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

October 20th, 1907

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . His Majesty is very much occupied with Dr. Reich's book, *Germany's Swelled Head*, and the German anonymous book by 'Seestern,' *The Battle of Armageddon*. The King thinks the people

[1] See above, p. 145, n. 1.

who write these books are in the pay of the Admiralty! Our Machiavellian reputation is truly astonishing! I've just got a fearful letter from the Prince of Wales about Reich's book, saying he is 'exceedingly annoyed by it,' and 'do I think the German Emperor has read it'! I've told His Royal Highness in reply that Dr. Reich is no doubt a paid agent of the Tariff Reform Committee, who want to make things hot for the Government, and that his reputation rests on his lectures on Platonic Love given at Claridge's Hotel last year with such abounding success to the young mothers (*in posse et in esse*) of Mayfair! and that such a pack of lies were never before concentrated in so small a compass. The only authority Dr. Reich quotes is the mendacious drivel of that halfpenny rag, the *Daily Express*.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

I don't ever remember seeing the King look better or in better spirits.

95: FROM THE PRINCE OF WALES

York Cottage
Sandringham, Norfolk
October 24th, 1907

My dear Sir John,

. . . I have read both the papers, 'Invasion and Raids' and your remarks on Reich's book, with much interest . . . I am certainly convinced no invasion or raid could be successful in our days. It is impossible that we in this country should not have notice, long before they reached our shores. Reich no doubt talks a lot of rot in his book and frequently lies. But at the same time I must say I thought it very unpleasant reading, and he may for all I know be in a position to know the feeling in Germany towards this country, but at the same time I don't see why they should want to attack and destroy us; we do not wish to do them any harm. No doubt the authorities in Germany (at least so we are told) dislike Sir John Fisher. You will be able to ask the German Emperor when you see him if that is true! What Fritz Ponsonby wrote I think is most sound. But we must also have some sort of an Army in England besides our Navy. . . .

Believe me, Very sincerely yours,

George

96: TO ARNOLD WHITE

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
November 19th, 1907

PRIVATE

My dear Friend,

Just this moment got your letter[1] and I honestly think I NEVER could be angry with you. *I certainly am not now!* Only I am extremely sorry I've disappointed you, because I do know all you have done for me and all you have sacrificed; *but what is it I've done wrong?*

I suggested to you about the 'Devil's Luck' story and I thought you approved, and I also went in for the efficiency and strength of the Fleet as shown in the manœuvres and the gunnery. Then Maxse and Lucy were so outrageously wrong about the 100,000 Germans and so mischievous to propagate such stories, I threw the ridicule on it the story deserved.[2] Anyhow, I am not going to be trotted out again, so you won't have cause to pitch into me any more. So please forgive me this once and don't flagellate me any more. I don't care a bit from others, but I honestly do from you. That's the truth.

Yours,

J. F.

[1] White's letter of November 13th had been prompted by Fisher's speech at the Guildhall banquet, November 9th, where he had got 'a most undreamt of reception . . . I've never been cheered like it before in my life!' (Fisher to Knollys, November 10th, 1907). The speech was full of humorous touches and reflected Fisher's cocky attitude on the strength and efficiency of the Navy. Towards the end was the line that was to become famous: 'So I turn to all of you, and I turn to my countrymen, and I say – Sleep quiet in your beds [laughter and cheers], and do not be disturbed by these bogies – invasion and otherwise – which are being periodically resuscitated by all sorts of leagues [laughter].' But the speech made White 'shudder. It is not that it was flippant or that it was untrue, but, speaking for the average d—d fool in the street, I must say that you seemed wholly to misunderstand what it is your countrymen want from the Head of their Navy. I can't help it if you are angry. I entreated you not to joke, and you agreed. But you have given your enemies a big stick, and as I am truly fond of you I regret it'.

[2] Henry (afterwards Sir Henry) Lucy was the famed 'Toby, M.P.', of *Punch*, 1881-1916 – 'my beloved old friend' (*Records*, p. 36). In his Guildhall speech Fisher had said: 'This afternoon I read the effusions of a red-hot and most charmingly interesting magazine editor [Maxse]. He had evidently been victimized by a *Punch* correspondent . . . [Maxse prints in the November *National Review*] that an army of 100,000 German soldiers had been practising embarking in the German Fleet. The absolute truth is that one solitary regiment was embarked for manœuvres . . . To embark 100,000 soldiers you want hundreds and thousands of tons of transport. You might just as well talk of practising embarking St. Paul's Cathedral in a penny steamer . . . These stories are not only silly – they are mischievous, very mischievous.'

97: TO EARL CAWDOR

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 25th, 1907

Private and Secret

Dear Lord Cawdor,

. . . I had a very long visit from Pretyman, who had been much perturbed by a visit to the Channel Fleet, and I am not surprised, as I regret to say we have Beresford in a state of almost open mutiny, which, of course, reacts on all under him. (I enclose you a note from Drury as a specimen of Beresford's wild talk.)[1] I think if you had been here as First Lord you would have quelled him as abruptly as you quelled Noel when he objected to the Admiralty policy of bringing home the battleships from China. My own firm belief is that Beresford would fizzle out in a week if he resigned, as he threatened to do the other day. He told the Prime Minister (*who told me this himself*) that he (Beresford), if he resigned, would join the Radical Party and get a Radical seat in Parliament as the most effective way of damaging the Admiralty! (I think the Prime Minister fancied him a bit off his head.) Beresford and all the malcontents are now coalescing to have a Parliamentary enquiry or a Royal Commission on Admiralty policy and administration. The result of any such enquiry would show the Navy to be so strong as to play into the hands of the very strong party in the House of Commons who want to reduce the Navy, but it would also so utterly shake the confidence of the Navy in the Sea Lords that we should have no option but to resign, and that, in confidence I may tell you, we have decided upon, and the Prime Minister and Lord Tweedmouth are aware of it. But I am not at all sure in their normal wobbly state whether they would risk anything. (*I am writing to you very freely so that you may know the whole position!*) Personally, I am getting rather sick of being vilified and calumniated daily, and that poisonous woman, Beresford's wife, is a slanderer of the first water, but I am advised to take no notice of her.

I wish to ask your attention to (A) in enclosed article in *Nineteenth Century*,[2] which is a paraphrase of your own remark that you were

[1] Probably this note from Admiral Drury (October 30th), which reads in part: 'Dear old Inglefield [Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Frederick S. Inglefield, commanding the 4th Cruiser Squadron, 1907-1909] tells me Charlie Beresford is more bitter than ever, and at his dinner table boasted that he had the Admiralty in the palm of his hand – the country was with him, and he was only waiting his time to crumble them up.'

[2] A reprint of Julian S. Corbett's 'Recent Attacks on the Admiralty' (*Nineteenth Century*, February 1907). The 'A' passage reads: '. . . a crowd of little or anonymous men begin to cry an alarm, and demand that the machine shall be stopped and opened up for all the world to see what work it is doing. Such folly would be ludicrous were it not our own, and so full of peril. Can they not see?'

not going to pull up the plant by the roots to see how it was growing! They cannot point to one single little detail of Admiralty policy that has failed. It is purely a 'fishing' enquiry (as I believe the lawyers term it) with the sole object of damaging the Admiralty. There's no backbone in the agitation . . . The real truth is that the present Government are strictly carrying out the naval policy of the last Government in every particular. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

98: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 4th, 1907

Private and Secret

Dear Corbett,

Herewith is Repington's statement.[1] Please keep it secret as well as the other paper. I heard late last night it was proposed to cross-examine Roberts and Repington at meeting on December 12, but it seems to me very unnecessary to do so. They have made their statement in great detail, we shall similarly draw up the answer, and then the Committee of Defence as judges sum up and decide.

Repington's object is specially to call Beresford to give evidence against the Admiralty. A scandal impossible to tolerate but a splendid platform for Beresford to resign on!

We have already had to tell him in an official letter a fortnight ago that 'his official language is without parallel from a subordinate to the Board of Admiralty' and have censured him accordingly. He is dying to stump the Country but wants to go off in fireworks! He 'demanded' Percy Scott's supersession and meant to go on that; but Percy Scott is as much a 'limelight' man as Beresford, so that fell through, as we declined any further action.

When you have read Repington, will you kindly tell me your opinion about cross-examination, as if we call Roberts and Repington as witnesses to be cross-examined, I don't see how we can resist their demand to call witnesses to back them up.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] This was probably a copy of Repington's testimony at the first meeting of the C.I.D. Sub-Committee on Invasion, November 27th. At Fisher's request Corbett was working closely with the Admiralty on the invasion inquiry. Thus, in November he had prepared a paper on invasion for the guidance of the Admiralty.

99: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 4th, 1907

My dear Corbett,

I hasten to thank you for your lucid letter.[1] I have had a message to-day from Asquith, who is President of the Sub-Committee, that under no circumstances whatever shall anyone else be called except Roberts and Repington, who are solely called to elucidate their statements. So I suppose one may accept that as all right.

With reference to the claim put forward by Beresford and taken up by Repington as gospel that he is 'the Admiral responsible for Home Waters in time of War,' the Admiralty 12 days ago, in view of his reiteration of this claim, wrote to Beresford as follows:—'Their Lordships must once more make it clear to you that it is the Admiralty who are responsible for the defence of Home as well as all other Waters in time of War.'

Your letter is extremely valuable to me, and if after studying Repington's statement anything further occurs to you, it would be very kind of you to let me have the advantage of it.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

100: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 13th, 1907

My beloved E.,

I hope you noticed the self-effacement and self-restraint of the First Sea Lord in not conducting the cross-examination of Roberts and Repington, and so letting it be so tame and innocuous![2] . . .

In haste, Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Corbett had written that day: 'As to cross-examining Roberts and Repington, I understand your objection to be that it would give them the right to seek further evidence. In a Court of Law this would not be so . . . Proceedings in Committee are, however, looser, and the Committee might see in a cross-examination a plea for admitting further evidence . . . Their reason for calling C.B. is admittedly that they regard the strategical disposition affirmed by the Admiralty as faulty in detail. I cannot see how, therefore, you can consent to his being called without admitting that the C.I.D. has the right to review the naval strategy of the Board . . . I take it its constitutional function is to co-ordinate military and naval strategy, not to interfere with the Admiralty responsibility for the details of naval strategy.'

[2] The cross-examination of Roberts and Repington at the third meeting of the Sub-Committee, December 12th, was not exactly 'tame and innocuous'. The session featured many sharp clashes between the military and naval spokesmen, especially between Roberts and Tweedmouth, during which both lost their tempers. Fisher's remark is evidence of his low spirits on account of both the 1908 Navy Estimates, which were meeting with stiff opposition in the Cabinet, and the invasion question.

I think Sir W. Beelzebub is showing the cloven hoof! . . . What fascinates me is that the Committee as a whole don't seem to take in the point that the whole case of Roberts & Repington rests on an absolute naval surprise which is really a sheer impossibility in view of our organized information.

101: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR FRANCIS BRIDGEMAN

[ca. January 5th, 1908]

Private and Secret

My dear Bridgeman,

I've seen the First Lord and my colleagues and they all *greatly* resent Beresford's line of conduct in criticizing the management of any part of your command,[1] as you are an independent Commander-in-Chief; and he is freely doing it *now* outside everywhere, and has written a private letter to Winsloe[2] to the same effect. But the Admiralty can't take action (on your private letters) unless you feel inclined to write an official letter to the Admiralty to say that you have received a criticism from Lord C. Beresford on the management of a portion of your Fleet which you cannot take as a private matter, as you are an independent Commander-in-Chief and must stand by your officers, especially your Commodore (T), against disparaging and unsubstantiated criticisms and reflections, and you beg therefore to place the matter in the hands of the Admiralty, so as to stop once for all a continuance of these incessant 'back-bitings' of the Home Fleet, which may lead to serious consequences, etc. And I suppose you would write to Beresford, to say you have written to the Admiralty, as you don't see your way to accept any remarks or reflections of his on the management of the Fleet under your command.

His reflections are totally uncalled for, and the First Lord told me to tell you privately that he is astonished at the moderation of your reply, and would have told Beresford 'to go to Hell.'

Yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Just before Christmas Beresford had issued a memorandum on the results of the October North Sea manœuvres carried out by the Home (Bridgeman), Channel, and Atlantic Fleets under his supreme command. It contained 'ill-considered criticism' and 'offensive remarks' on the actions of Bridgeman's senior officers, as well as an assertion that the idea underlying the armoured cruiser was fundamentally unsound. The quotes are from Bridgeman's letter to Fisher of January 4th. On January 17th the Admiralty requested that Beresford recall the memorandum and expunge the two offensive paragraphs before reissuing it.

[2] Rear-Admiral Winsloe was Fourth Sea Lord, 1907-1910.

102: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 19th, 1908

My dear E.,

. . . I had a *tête-à-tête* lunch with Winston Churchill; he unexpectedly came to the Admiralty and I was whirled off with him to the Ritz. I had 2 hours with him. He is very keen to fight on my behalf and is simply boiling with fury at Beresford & Co., but I've told him the watchword is 'Silence'. He is an enthusiastic friend certainly! He told me he would get six men on both sides to join in *con amore*, F. E. Smith,[1] etc., etc. I forget the other names. It was rather sweet: he said his penchant for me was that I painted with a big brush! and was violent! I reminded him that even 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force' — *vide* yesterday's second lesson.

Yours, J. F.

103: TO SIR EDWARD GREY

January 23rd, 1908

Private

Dear Sir Edward,

It was most kind of you to see me this morning. Of course I didn't say half of what is imperative should be known to you before the Cabinet takes the (in my opinion) most fatal step of intervening and enquiring into the purely expert matter of naval strategy and detailed war plans. As I said, the mere fact of such an investigation or enquiry, however secret, would be *prima-facie* evidence of the Cabinet being disquieted and shaken in its confidence in the Board of Admiralty generally and the First Sea Lord in particular, as he is the Member of the Board specially charged with the organization for war. No officer under the Board of Admiralty — *no matter who* — has any other duty whatever except to obey orders, and it is simply unprecedented in the history of the British Navy what has occurred in regard to Lord C. Beresford interviewing Members of the Cabinet and indicting the Board of Admiralty as failing in its duty. Every officer in the Navy must implicitly and without question carry out the orders of the Admiralty and never question or criticize it —

[1] F. E. Smith (afterwards first Earl of Birkenhead), one of the greatest courtroom advocates of his time, Conservative M.P., 1906-1918, later Lord Chancellor, 1919-1922, and Secretary of State for India, 1924-1928. The brilliant and witty 'F. E.' became one of Fisher's principal supporters in the Conservative camp.

'*Se soumettre ou se démettre.*'[1]

I enclose the Board Minute of a former Admiralty when the Admiral Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean criticized the policy of the Board[2] — not to others but in respectful language to the Board itself — by return of post to haul down his flag and come on shore. This present tampering with mutiny (for it is nothing else) is dealing a deadly blow at the discipline of the Navy in shaking the confidence of the Navy in the firmness and strength of the Board of Admiralty.

I enclose you Captain Pakenham's report on the conduct of the Japanese War,[3] and the historical retrospect on the case in point — that the Admiralty alone (and no Admiral under it) must conduct the war.

I enclose the 188 pages of War Plans. I think you will find Part I the finest bit of strategical exposition you ever read. In the copy I send you the names of the ships have not been brought up to date, advisedly, as it makes it less open to objection being seen by the few you choose to show it to under confidence. I have marked the special features of Sir A. Wilson's War Plan. The lovely thing is, I gave these War Plans personally to Lord Charles Beresford nearly a year ago, and though he has been repeatedly asked to send to the Admiralty his idea of a War Plan, he has not done so, and wrote last week to Lord Tweedmouth to ask that the Director of Naval Intelligence, from the Admiralty, and his Assistant should be sent to meet him at Claridge's Hotel to '*fog out*' (his term) a skeleton idea he had! That is to say, the purely Hibernian proposition is made by Lord Charles Beresford that the Admiralty should '*fog out*' a scheme of war in opposition to their own plans which they know and believe to be the best!

As I said, I know the Cabinet is supreme, but no self-respecting

[1] The phrase was lifted from a letter: 'I saw Lady Londonderry last week and afterwards wrote her a very long letter pointing out that the only course for Beresford was "se soumettre ou se démettre", and that "se soumettre" was the wisest course from every point of view, and that it meant not only holding his tongue and doing what he was told but also keeping Custance strictly in order and cutting off all relations with his "Syndicate of Discontent" ' (Thursfield to Fisher, January 20th, 1908). Lady Londonderry, the wife of the sixth Marquess of Londonderry, had 'always [been] very affectionate to me', Fisher had noted a few weeks earlier. But she was to become one of 'the Duchesses', his generic name for the society ladies who backed Beresford.

[2] Lord Hood in 1795.

[3] Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) William C. Pakenham, Naval Attaché in Tokyo, 1904-1906. He was on board the battleship *Asahi* continuously from March 1904 until after Tsushima. 'The Mikado asked Admiral Togo to bring him the bravest man in his Fleet after the battle of Tsushima, and Togo brought Pakenham!' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, July 21st, 1912.)

First Sea Lord could hold his office for five minutes if such a want of confidence is shown in him as any questioning of the war organization of the Admiralty at the instigation of an officer under his orders, who thus deliberately ignores his authority and who is supported in it by the action of the Cabinet investigating a matter which is one of purely expert judgment. How could the Cabinet express any opinion on Sir A. Wilson's cardinal feature of 'Sweeps' — in which I for one cannot express my confidence? Are the Cabinet going to decide which is right — Sir A. Wilson, who wants the British Battle Fleet far removed from the North Sea, or Lord Charles Beresford, who wants it there? I venture to say to you with all the emphasis at my command and with the deepest respect for the authority of the Cabinet: 'If you have any doubts, get rid of the Admiralty and get fresh members in whom you have implicit confidence; but for God's sake have no Aulic Council for directing the War Policy of the British Navy.'

I do earnestly hope you may have time, which I assure you won't be wasted, in reading the papers herewith, and that, believe me, I will gladly disappear if I am in any way an embarrassment to the Government. BUT WHILE I AM WHERE I AM, I must press for Lord Charles Beresford obeying orders instead of wanting to give them. Never has such forbearance been shown as to him. The extracts from official correspondence I send herewith will make this plain.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

104: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

January 23rd, 1908

Secret

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

. . . I have put the case to Sir E. Grey whether a Committee of the Cabinet would feel itself competent to discuss the practicability of Sir A. Wilson's cardinal feature of 'Sweeps,' with which I am at absolute variance; and do they propose to take this view as against those of the First Sea Lord, Director of Naval Intelligence,[1] and officers of [the] War College. Suppose they take Sir A. Wilson's view

[1] Captain Slade had succeeded Ottley as Director of Naval Intelligence, 1907-1909.

— is the Cabinet going to decide on a War Plan of their own founded on this principle? Again, Sir A. Wilson is dead against the Battle Fleet being anywhere near the North Sea, whilst Lord C. Beresford is as strongly for it. Will the Cabinet decide how the Fleet is to be distributed — whether according to Sir A. Wilson or according to Lord C. Beresford? In this case the Admiralty view is opposed to both of them. Sir A. Wilson scouts the idea of the feasibility of the 100,000 German troops establishing themselves in Great Britain, while Lord C. Beresford in an official letter says it is 'such an extraordinary expression of opinion (on the part of Sir A. Wilson) that it has astonished me.' I just mention the above cases, taken at random, in order to enquire what is in the mind of the Cabinet in entertaining the idea of an enquiry. Manifestly an enquiry must indicate a feeling of disquietude on the part of the Cabinet and of want of confidence in the present Admiralty management of war arrangements; and that being so, is not the right course to select those in whom absolute confidence can be placed — for any enquiry, however secret, would paralyse the existing authority responsible for war organization and war plans. To me it is almost incredible that it should have been permitted to Naval Officers on full pay and holding high appointments to be heard against the Board of Admiralty —

'Se soumettre ou se démettre.'

But that officers should be openly fighting against the Board of Admiralty, and be encouraged by an enquiry being held in consequence of their insubordinate conduct, is intolerable — is unprecedented — might have far-reaching consequences in war, and is subversive of the best traditions of the Navy in peace.

You have the 188 pages of print of a portion of the War Plans — other plans are in course of continuous development as mentioned in attached paper. Plans of war imply secrecy — secrets which should be locked in the breast of the War Director alone, as was the case in Japan — secrets which may involve the calling on colleagues for measures and material which cannot fully be explained to them; but if all is to be opened out and the Admiralty not trusted, I cannot imagine the retention of office by any First Sea Lord — as being the member of the Board more immediately connected with the organization for war and the preparation of war plans. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

I feel certain that if Sir E. Grey got up in the House of Commons in reply to a friendly question at the very first opportunity and stated that the Government had no intention whatever of holding *any sort of* enquiry and the Board of Admiralty had the full confidence of the Government and viewed with extreme regret the agitation by Naval Officers as being most prejudicial to public interests and to discipline, that there would be complete collapse of Beresford. But he has been distinctly encouraged by the visits of Mr. Haldane and others to pursue his unprecedented campaign. I asked Sir E. Grey how he would view Sir C. Hardinge and Sir F. Bertie interviewing the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet as to his effete conduct of the Foreign Affairs of this country and stating that he was 'a fraud and a danger to the Empire'!

105: TO EARL CAWDOR

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 27th, 1908

Dear Lord Cawdor,

Thank you for your letter just come. Mr. Balfour asked me to lunch on Saturday and I had a happy *tête-à-tête* with him. He said Beresford was holding forth 'in every drawing-room in London' against the Admiralty, and the petticoats are rallying round him. 'The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world'!

I had a long interview, and a very cordial one, with Sir E. Grey, and the result satisfactory, I think, in stopping what Beresford had asked for, and apparently Haldane supported for the Cabinet to hear him (Beresford) against the Admiralty. Haldane not playing fair. He thinks this is going to help him with his Territorial Army, and he has thrown himself into the arms of Lord Roberts and the invasion party to get this 300,000 men to resist invasion. I thought, after seeing Sir E. Grey, I would write him a letter and one to Lord Tweedmouth. '*Litera scripta manet*'; a conversation sometimes vanishes. I think I am justified in asking you to read them, as *not* a party matter. The story is that Beresford has got Sir E. Carson[1] to raise his case in the House, but I don't believe it. . . .

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Sir Edward (afterwards Baron) Carson, Unionist M.P., 1892-1921, and 'one of the most remarkable and powerful advocates that the bar has ever produced'; later leader of the Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1910-1921, and First Lord of the Admiralty, 1916-1917.

106: TO REAR-ADMIRAL CHARLES L. OTTLEY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 28th, 1908

Private
Dear Ottley,

When convenient please come and see me — either Admiralty in forenoon any day or my house in the afternoon, just as you like. We have got to safeguard Balfour and justify previous decisions of the Defence Committee or its great authority will be shaken, but whether 1½ tons a man or 3 tons a man, the mass of transports is in either case great, and such a huge target when at sea as could not escape us. But the peculiar wonder to me is the serious arguing that the German Fleet is going to hold the Straits of Dover for 48 hours and not a living soul pass any of the German frontiers for two or three days. It's a waste of time to talk of Frederick the Great and Silesia — the present marvellous dissemination of information, especially financially, utterly precludes the faintest possibility of that naval surprise upon which the whole case of invasion hangs, as set forth by Repington (Roberts is a cypher!), but even assuming the surprise, the case remains impossible.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

107: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 31st, 1908

My dear E.,

. . . I met Grey at dinner last night, and he seemed to me to be 'on the wobble' again about Beresford and asked me 'if it couldn't be arranged to come to terms with him'. I told him we had once done so very much to the disadvantage of the public service and to glorify his *amour-propre* and he had written officially to say how greatly he appreciated it, etc., and was going to be good ever after, as all his wants satisfied, but it only lasted a few weeks before he was at it again. What is wanted to stop it is a Parliamentary Statement that the Government support the Admiralty and won't have any enquiry. One of the principal Editors told me yesterday that the most desperate efforts had been made by Beresford and his wife to capture

him to 'go' for me, and he would not, and he told me he knew for a fact the same desperate efforts were being made on every Editor in London. This man said straight to Beresford, 'Why don't you resign? but if you don't resign you ought to be loyal.'

Grey said it was represented to him that Beresford had the whole Navy. I told him it was not true, but even if it was, so much the more ought the Government to be firm in supporting the Admiralty against an Absalomic campaign by Beresford in inciting the Service to mutiny, and it was scandalous this parleying with mutiny by persons in high position giving encouragement to Beresford by seeing him and discussing mutiny with him. Apparently the only thing for me to do is to 'sit tight'. These politicians are a flabby lot.

Yours,

J. F.

108: TO J. A. SPENDER[1]

February 11th, 1908

Dear Mr. Spender,

I began a letter to you on Saturday, but too busy to finish it, wanting you to spare half an hour to hear the salient points, stripped of technicalities, about the Dreadnought type being forced upon us when it was. If you could fix any day about 6 p.m. at my house, 16 Queen Anne's Gate, St. James's Park, I honestly believe you would not regret it and be greatly interested. The truth is we want no one to know the truth about the Dreadnought, and that hampers one a good deal. I don't want to influence you, nor for you to say a word — indeed, quite the other way — but I should like you personally to be convinced (and I know I can convince you) that the introduction of the Dreadnought, in ways at present unknown to you, has been economical and likely to be peace-preserving! I think it was on Friday [February 7th] you said something in the *Westminster Gazette* about the introduction of the Dreadnought type being a mistake, and this put it into my head to write to you. I promise not to bore you.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] J. A. Spender, confidant of Asquith and Grey, and Editor of the Liberal *Westminster Gazette*, 1896-1922. The fame of the paper was made by Spender's leading article on the front page. He first met Fisher through Esher very soon after Fisher became First Sea Lord. Thereafter the two men were in close and regular contact, and on terms of warm friendship until the end of Fisher's life.

109: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 13th, 1908

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

I am really reluctant to worry you about my personal feelings when you are so harassed over the Estimates, which I fear are going to cause you public trouble, as the Murray Macdonald pendulum, I am told, has been checked and swinging the other way.[1] (I hope the dastardly conduct of the Unionists in their intention to have voted with Murray Macdonald will be exposed.)

All I wished to say is that any allusion, however nicely worded, as to past Reforms and the necessity for rest will certainly be interpreted in a way very offensive to me. I happen to know it for certain in advance. This being the case, and being the only member of the Board to whom the inference that will be drawn is applicable (as all the other members are newcomers), I hope you will kindly forgive me for my natural persistence in objecting to the introduction of a paragraph which seems utterly uncalled for by anything that has been said or written, and so one rather resents the gratuitous unpleasantness.

I have been hearing with great pleasure that all those who heard Captain Haworth-Booth[2] give his evidence on mobilization at the Defence Committee are impressed with the efficiency of our fighting readiness.

Please don't trouble to reply. I must leave my feelings in your hands.

Yours truly, J. A. Fisher

110: TO ARNOLD WHITE

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.
February 17th, 1908

Private

My dear Friend,

I know full well what you have done for me and what you have hazarded for me and what you have forgone for me. I know it all!

[1] J. A. Murray Macdonald, Liberal M.P., 1906-1922, was the leader of the 'Little Navy' group in the party. On the Cabinet crisis over the 1908 estimates, see *Esher*, II, 280-4.

[2] Afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir Francis F. Haworth-Booth; Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence, 1905-1908.

I know also that at the base of it all is the sincere and *well-founded* belief that it is for the public good you have acted as you have, and so that you don't care a brass farthing what anyone says or does to vilify you. But now I say to you (*with knowledge of what is going on*) that Beresford, being full of money as well as of malignancy, will seize any opportunity of a libel action, and you can't afford it, nor can I afford to help you. I don't know the wiles of libel. I only write this to warn you, as I could never forgive myself if you got beat by money and I had not tried beforehand to guard you against it.

Yours ever,

J. F.

III: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
February 20th, 1908

My dear Friend,

. . . I've not seen the German Emperor's letter to Tweedmouth,[1] who only gave me a hazy idea of it. A most astounding thing, I think. It looks as if the German Emperor was trying on the 'Delcassé' game again. If so he will find the Britishers will rise to a man! I knew nothing of Esher's letter before it went, but obviously pure friendship impelled him to write it and there is nothing for him to justify. Only two days ago Redesdale said to me it was one of the ablest letters he ever read and scores of people had told him the same thing.[2]

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Esher had written, and had allowed to be published (*The Times*, February 6th), a letter to the Imperial Maritime League replying to their invitation to join their council. Since the League had for its immediate aim a 'public enquiry' into the state of the Navy, Esher spurned the invitation and went on to say: 'There is not a man in Germany from the Emperor downwards who would not welcome the fall of Sir John Fisher . . .' This prompted a personal letter from William II to Tweedmouth (February 16th) disavowing any aggressive naval designs and describing the statement regarding Fisher as 'a piece of unmitigated balderdash'. It was a most extraordinary thing for the Emperor to write to a British Cabinet Minister at all. Tweedmouth, flattered, talked about the letter everywhere. '. . . Tweedmouth is really in a rabid state of exaltation over the notoriety and is burning to say more' (Fisher to Esher, late February 1908).

[2] The first Baron Redesdale, author and onetime diplomat and M.P. Fisher wrote Esher on March 25th: 'You never did a friend a better service than you did me by that letter, and personally I regret nothing, not even for your sake, as it was a splendidly composed letter and the German Emperor and *The Times* [see below, p. 166, n. 2] between them have raised it into a classic!'

112: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 20th, 1908

Secret

My beloved Friend,

I had a good long time with the King. He began in violence against you, but I pointed out to him that I was the culprit, not YOU, because I it was who showed you all the plans, etc., at Portsmouth,[1] and also it was out of PURE FRIENDSHIP to ME that you wrote the letter, and the end bit about the German Emperor, etc., as true as gospel! So it was rather lovely, *and he is sweet!* He said, 'Well, what right had you to make plans at Portsmouth when you didn't know whether you were going to be First Sea Lord?' I think if you don't see him for a few days, it will be as ever you were. I said, 'Well, Sir, it *was* a good letter, wasn't it?' He said, 'Of course it was, because he is a most able man'! That dear blessed Francis [Knollys] is a real trump in standing by his friends.

No time for more.

Yours ever,

J. F.

I really do feel guilty, as I told the King, in being the real culprit.

113: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 21st, 1908

My beloved E.,

. . . *Secret.* Tirpitz asked a mutual civilian friend living in Berlin to enquire very privately of me whether I would agree to limiting size of guns and size of ships,[2] as this is *vital* to the Germans, who *can't go* bigger than the *Dreadnought* in guns or size. I wrote back by return of post yesterday morning, 'Tell him I'll see him d—d first!' (*Them's the very words!*) I wonder what Wilhelm will say to that if Tirpitz shows him the letter!

Yours till death,

J. F.

[1] Esher's letter to the Imperial Maritime League mentioned that in November 1903, Fisher, then Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, had unfolded to him the schemes of naval reform which were carried out when he became First Sea Lord, and that the Admiral had given him memoranda on the reform projects.

[2] Tirpitz may have known that the Admiralty was considering 13.5-inch gun, 20,000-ton battleships. 'His asking corroborates one's instinct that one should do what this print [on the new battleship type] says' (Fisher to Corbett, March 11th, 1908).

114: TO ARNOLD WHITE

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
February 23rd, 1908

Private

My dear Arnold White,

What a very wicked world this! F. E. Smith, M.P., asked me to meet Carson, Rufus Isaacs, Simon,[1] M.P., and another whose name I forget, as being sympathetic and friendly, and certainly they all behaved so. I said but little, as they were all so full of talk, and remained alone afterwards with F. E. Smith to discuss what we had at heart. I heard afterwards that Carson had been interviewed by Beresford to take up his case in the House of Commons. I mentioned this to Lady Londonderry, and she said, 'Well, you never know what one Irishman won't do for another.' Apropos of my saying that I thought Balfour would object to his doing so, I went for a walk with Balfour last night, and from what he quite spontaneously and unnecessarily said to me, I fancy he will see me through anything; *but please keep this private*. He apparently had heard fully about all the intrigues against me. I think I had better not open my mouth.

I had a long interview with the King the day before yesterday and the Prince of Wales to-day. I did not seek either interview. They are both solid friends, and both told me silence was my strength. I am indeed grateful to you.

Yours,

J. F.

115: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

March 7th, 1908

Private and Secret

My beloved E.,

. . . Some kind friend circulated the story that YOU had told Repington.[2] Luckily I have a reliable informant, who let me know

[1] The two brilliant lawyers: Rufus Isaacs (afterwards first Marquess of Reading), Liberal M.P., 1904-1913, later Lord Chief Justice of England, 1913-1921, and Viceroy of India, 1921-1926; John A. (afterwards first Viscount) Simon, Liberal M.P., 1906-1940 (excepting 1919-1921), Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1931-1935.

[2] Repington had got wind of the Emperor's letter to Tweedmouth at the end of February. It appeared to him an 'insidious attempt to influence, in German interests, a British First Lord, and at a most critical moment, namely, just before the Estimates were coming on in Parliament' (Repington: *Vestigia* [London, 1919], p. 284). To prevent a recurrence of this action, Repington published an exposé in *The Times*, March 6th.

that a lady gave it to Repington. The fact is that Tweedmouth told lots of people about it and quoted big pieces of the letter. I had a long talk with him this morning. He appears to have got it 'hot' from his colleagues. I can't imagine that the letters will be published, as it would be a frightful show up for the German Emperor. Indeed, it would be most unfair to him. He loses his temper with you in the letter, because of your standing by me in your letter to the Navy League, and he quotes part of my speech at the Guildhall Banquet and goes into a dissertation about his Fleet being 5 times weaker than ours. I am sending a letter to the King telling him all about it and how you have been falsely accused of giving Repington the information, as someone may pass that story on to him.

I've just been with the Queen and her sister.[1] They sent for me and they are full of fury over the whole business and the utter meanness of *The Times*.[2] I entreated Tweedmouth to drop it all, after what Asquith had said (which is quite sufficient),[3] but he is simply burning with exaltation over it and has been to see Lansdowne about making a speech in the House of Lords. (What is now wanted is a dictatorial Prime Minister.) There's a secret letter from Lascelles[4] in which he says that the Emperor told him the King had sent him a reprimand.

There's nothing for you to be bothered about, I think, and if the letter is published, the whole world will see that you are the *one* man who 'rose' the German Emperor, and so I expect you'll be worshipped accordingly! All the same, I am awfully sorry that your

[1] Queen Alexandra, King Edward's consort, and the Dowager Empress Marie of Russia, mother of Tsar Nicholas II. The Queen and Fisher were good, warm friends. Their relations were marked by informality and even affection. Thus, we find the Admiral telegraphing her on December 2nd, 1906: 'Your Majesty is 62 to-day. May you live till you look it is the fervent wish of your humble admirer.' She telegraphed this reply the same day: 'In your kind telegram you wish me too long a life. It would take me 300 before I could look 62 after your reckoning. I am delighted with the lovely Mecca stone.' She would begin her letters, 'Dear Admiral "Jack" '.

[2] A strong leader in *The Times* (March 6th), whose Editor had seen the Emperor's letter, supported Repington. 'If there was any doubt before about the meaning of German naval expansion, none can remain after an attempt of this kind to influence the Minister responsible for our Navy in a direction favourable to German interests; an attempt, in other words, to make it more easy for German preparations to overtake our own.' Few newspapers followed the lead of *The Times*, which was generally denounced for attempting to raise a scare.

[3] Asquith had admitted in the House of Commons (March 6th) that Tweedmouth had on February 18th received a private and personal communication from the Emperor, 'conceived in an entirely friendly spirit'. Tweedmouth's answer, he said, was equally private and informal, and neither the letter nor the reply was known or communicated to the Cabinet. Asquith added that before the letter arrived, the Cabinet had come to a final decision with regard to the Navy Estimates for the year.

[4] Sir Frank Lascelles, Ambassador at Berlin, 1895-1908.

blessed friendship for me has pulled you into the passing antagonism (which I know is past) with the King. . . .

Ever yours,

J. F.

116: TO KING EDWARD

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 8th, 1908

With Sir John Fisher's humble duty Your Majesty may be interested in enclosed *very secret* paper just received from a *thoroughly reliable* friend at Berlin and which has not been seen by anyone, and it will be best that no one but Your Majesty should ever see it.[1]

Your Majesty may like to know that I got it from *The Times* (but not to be divulged) that a lady gave *The Times* the information about the German Emperor's letter. Esher has been falsely accused of it, but Your Majesty will know that Lord Esher is the very last man to wish the letter to become public. Repington, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, I know to be absolutely unscrupulous. I had proofs — and I strongly objected at the Committee of Imperial Defence to the access given him to secret documents. He is extremely clever and most able with his pen, and Mr. Haldane finds him very useful. I venture to enclose for Your Majesty to see a letter *just this moment* come from Esher. Mr. Asquith's statement in the House of Commons was excellent and it will be a very great pity if one more word is said. . . .

With my most humble duty to Your Majesty and great hopes of Biarritz being good for Your Majesty's health,

I am Your Majesty's most humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

[1] The paper was prefaced by the statement: 'In return for great service recently rendered to a Foreign Minister, the following information was given by him to the writer when recently visiting a Foreign Capital.' The most important point made in the paper was that it was believed that a secret convention existed between Germany and Sweden whereby 'in case of war' Denmark would be partitioned, Sweden taking the islands and Germany the mainland.

117: FROM KING EDWARD[1]

Biarritz
March 10th, 1908

Private

My dear Fisher,

Many thanks for your letter of 8th and enclosures. The confidential document you send me is most interesting, and I will keep it for my own information, but you should tell C. Hardinge.

It is a great pity that there has been so much fuss and publicity about G[erman] E[mperor]'s letter. The 1st Lord was so pleased at hearing direct fr[om] him that he told my Lady he sent [it] and no wonder *The Times* hearing of it, but its vicious article was quite uncalled for. After Mr. Asquith's statement in H. of C., I hope the whole matter will drop, and I do not think that it is likely to occur again. I fancy that the military correspondent to whom you allude is very clever but equally unprincipled, and the Committee of I.[mperial] Defence are very foolish in giving him access to secret documents, which you tell me is the case. I return Esher's letter. He was not likely to mention the subject of G. E.'s letter as he knows that it was the outcome of his very unfortunate one! . . .

Ever, Yours very sincerely,

Edward R.

118: TO KING EDWARD[2]

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 14th, 1908

With Sir John Fisher's humble duty to Your Majesty, and in accordance with Your Majesty's orders, I saw Hardinge as to the

[1] 'Acting on Sir Francis Knollys's example and advice [in 1910, after the King's death], I burnt all his letters to me, except one or two [actually, about a dozen] purely personal in their delightful adherence to Right and Justice!' (*Memories*, p. 3). A Fisher notation on an empty envelope which once contained all the King's letters reads: 'King Edward's letters at Kilverstone, but most are burnt as sacredly private and not meant for other eyes.'

[2] Some time afterwards, Fisher noted on a copy of this letter: 'This letter to King Edward followed on a previous long conversation with His Majesty in which I urged that we should "Copenhagen" *à la* Nelson the German Fleet at Kiel – quite an easy proposition, and His Majesty was convinced. His Majesty was also convinced that a war with Germany was inevitable. I had proved this to His Majesty's satisfaction in the previous year, but no one else with sufficient authority could I find to take the vital step to stop it. So all that could be done was to concentrate the whole British naval strength in northern waters, which was done, and done without exciting observation until Admiral Mahan unfortunately wrote an article [*Scientific American*, December 7th, 1907] to say 88 [86] per cent of England's guns were pointed at Germany. All this time I was being virulently assailed for depleting foreign squadrons, and Admirals were mutinous.' Compare with Fisher's note on the same (though edited) letter in *Memories*, pp. 3-4, where the King's reaction is discreetly omitted.

contents of that secret paper sent Your Majesty, but did not disclose to Hardinge what makes it so valuable — that it came from a Minister of Foreign Affairs whose testimony on this point is absolutely reliable.

I told Hardinge (and asked him to forgive my presumption in saying it) that we were making a hideous mistake in our half-measures, which please no one and perpetuate the fable of 'perfidious Albion', and that we ought to have thrown in our lot with Russia completely and let her fortify the Aland Islands as against Sweden and Germany.[1] For a naval war (as against Germany) we want Russia with us, and we want the Aland Islands fortified. Germany has got Sweden in her pocket now, and they will divide Denmark between them in case of war as against Russia and England, and (unless our offensive is quick) close the Baltic as effectually as the Sultan locks up the Black Sea with the possession of the Dardanelles. Russia and Turkey are the two Powers, and the *only two*, that matter to us as against Germany, and that we have eventually to fight Germany is just as sure as anything human can be, solely because she can't expand commercially without it.

I humbly trust Your Majesty will forgive me my presumption in talking about politics, but I am certain I am right, and I only look at it because if we fight we want Russia and Turkey on our side against Germany. . . .

I've told Esher he had a narrow escape of being Ambassador at Berlin!

With my very humble and grateful thanks for Your Majesty's letter,

I am, Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Under the Treaty of Paris of 1856, Great Britain, France, and Russia had agreed that 'the Aaland Islands shall not be fortified and no military or naval establishment shall be maintained there'. In June 1907 Russia began negotiations with Germany, France, and England for the removal of this limitation on her sovereignty. All three powers agreed in principle. But Sweden protested vehemently. The popular cry was that if the Aaland Islands were fortified they would be a pistol held at the heart of Sweden. The English Government finally decided (January 1908) that the clause should stand, and the excitement subsided.

119: FROM KING EDWARD

Biarritz
March 17th, 1908

Private
My dear Fisher,

. . . I am very glad that you showed C. Hardinge the secret paper you sent me, and I hope he appreciated its value and importance. It goes agst the grain that we should desert the Saxon for the Celtic Races, who ought to be our natural allies, but I confess that the intense jealousy of one of the former countries and races makes them unfortunately our bitterest enemies. Still I do not despair that if we continue to put our foot down, as we do now, they will accept the inevitable and be friendly with us, but we must never cease keeping our 'weather eye open' across the North Sea! One good result from that silly correspondence between the G. E. and your indiscreet Chief has been the Ch[ancellor] of the Exchequer's speech in H. of Commons.[1] It was a surprise to all his Party and especially his colleagues, but he has 'burnt his boats' and our Teutonic friends know that an Englishman is as good as his word! . . .

We must have no more letters with candid statements from our friend Esher which are made public, or he will end by becoming a political *enfant terrible*!

I hear the Queen and Empress Dowager of Russia have been visiting you! You have kept it a profound secret fr[om] me!

Ever, Yours very sincerely,

Edward R.

120: FROM PRINCE HENRY OF PRUSSIA[2]

Kiel
March 24th, 1908

Dear Admiral Fisher,

Never mind *The Times*, never mind the press! Let them be d—d like Admiral Farragut said at Mobile, when reminded of the mines ahead!

[1] Asquith, in the House of Commons, March 10th, reaffirmed that England must maintain its unassailable supremacy at sea, and that if Balfour's apprehension (that Germany might have, towards the end of 1911, 13 dreadnoughts and battle cruisers to England's 12) seemed, by the time of the 1909 estimates, to have substance, the Government would then provide for enough ships to prevent any German superiority in 1911.

[2] Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the Emperor William II, whom Fisher had known since 1882. The Admiral sent this letter on to the King.

I only hope that these lines will *not get beyond the eyes of their reader!*

I am now reading Hislam's book, *The Admiralty of the Atlantic* [1908], and will say so much, that he who tries to prove that Germany is, or will be, a menace to England, or that Germany intends to be aggressive, is certainly quite in the wrong and (pardon me) a lunatic!

Germany wishes to be in a position to DEFEND her rights, but *not* to *dispute* the rights of others! All said and written to the contrary is absurd, as it is ridiculous and *untrue*! . . .

Yours very sincerely,

Henry Prince of Prussia

121: TO THE EARL OF TWEEDMOUTH[1]

[ca. April 11th, 1908]

Dear Lord Tweedmouth,

The Latin grammar says, '*Litera scripta manet*' — a really good saying, for the points of an argument are so often lost in a conversation, and I hope you will forgive my presumption in presuming to offer you my advice in what is really to you and to all of us a very bitter blow. But why make the blow more bitter by any step that increases its bitterness? I think it would be made more bitter by your refusing to be Lord President of the Council, for the following reasons:

I. Unquestionably, if you go altogether, the inference will be not what Mr. Asquith wishes to be the inference, which is that you go to another appointment for the patriotic and self-sacrificing reason of giving effect to a very reasonable demand of the House of Commons that the First Lord shall be in that House.

II. Your accepting Mr. Asquith's wishes is a sacrifice and is sure to produce its effect later on in your choice of any other high post in the state that falls vacant.

III. Your leaving the Government altogether would be construed into an admission that your administration of the Navy had failed, *which it has not*, and it would be a grievous blow just now to the Navy for any such impression to gain ground.

[1] Asquith, on succeeding the ailing Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister on April 5th (-1916), made certain important ministerial changes. Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer (-1915) and his place as President of the Board of Trade was taken by Churchill (-1910). Churchill was Fisher's first choice as Tweedmouth's successor, but it was Reginald McKenna who replaced Tweedmouth at the Admiralty (-1911), the latter becoming Lord President of the Council until September, when he resigned.

IV. *Assuredly* your influence for the good of the Navy would be infinitely more powerful *in the Cabinet* than out of it. *This is absolutely certain* and will, I hope, have the chief weight with you. *There will be deep sympathy with you on all sides.*

I do most sincerely entreat you to accept Mr. Asquith's wishes for the good of the Navy.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

122: TO KING EDWARD

April 11th, 1908

With Sir John Fisher's humble duty to Your Majesty. Mr. Asquith telegraphed for me to see him immediately on his arrival, and I feel very deeply indeed Your Majesty's most gracious influence, as was so evident from Mr. Asquith's conversation. It did not seem either wise or proper of me to criticize Mr. McKenna. Mr. Asquith made the observation, 'I know you and McKenna fought over the Navy Estimates, but I am sure he will get on with you.' He mentioned several names also to succeed Robertson and Lambert, but there again I thought it the best thing to leave the matter to him for Your Majesty's approval. I am very sorry indeed for Lord Tweedmouth, as he will feel it bitterly.

If not presumptuous of me, I once again beg to submit my deepest thanks for Your Majesty's most gracious confidence, which of course is the reason of Mr. Asquith's kindness to me.

I am, Sir, Your Majesty's most humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

I have no doubt of McKenna being friendly.[1]

123: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 16th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I think I ought to explain to you at once what the Admiralty position *is*, *always has been*, and *must ever remain*, if discipline is to be maintained and the authority of the Board of Admiralty preserved —

[1] The King replied (April 14th): 'When I agreed to Mr. McKenna's appointm^{t}, it was on condition that you kept your present post. The P.M. never made the *slightest* difficulty – on the contrary, was most desirous that you should remain.'

and that is, that there must be no cavilling at or criticizing of their orders by officers on active service afloat, and more especially by those in high command; and this is why I suggested to you, what indeed you yourself had in mind (as to interviews with malcontents), that you could not have an amateur outside Board of Admiralty directing naval policy in opposition to your official Board of Admiralty. If complete confidence cannot be given to the Sea Lords, they ought to be changed, but there is an end of all things if, taking the instance you gave me, Lord C. Beresford is to dictate to the Admiralty what particular destroyers he should have, or what should be the constitution of his Fleet: 'Se soumettre ou se démettre' — that's the plain answer to give him; or, as Mr. John Burns put it more graphically:

'*The Quarterdeck and Silence,*
or *Westminster and Gas,*'

as Beresford threatens to go into Parliament and make it hot for the Admiralty!

I think my colleagues will tell you that it is unprecedented the lengths to which Lord Charles Beresford has been permitted (I think, wrongly) to flout the Admiralty; but I have subjected my strong personal convictions to the judgment of others, and having gone so far I think it's wisdom to wait now till the autumn, when probably matters will arrange themselves. In the meantime I am confident, from what you have kindly said, that you will give no encouragement to Lord Charles Beresford that he will receive any sort of countenance in his disloyal, and what I may even term insubordinate, conduct towards the Admiralty because a new First Lord has arrived. I hope you will not misinterpret my motive in writing so frankly to you, and I think it best to do so at once before you (quite inadvertently) give any sort of recognition to what is really a most mischievous agitation. There will be a great change in Admiralty criticism now that we have someone in the House of Commons who can hit back. The critics won't want to hit again! . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

124: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 19th, 1908

Secret

My beloved E.,

. . . I got a note from F. K. [Knollys] to say the King wanted to see me this afternoon at 3 p.m. . . . *Private.* I got 3 letters from the King at Biarritz, all extremely cordial and communicative and unsought by me. I mention this to prove to you his kindly feelings and support . . . When I met the King on arrival, he said I was to be sure and see him, as he had something serious to say to me. I suppose I was with him more than an hour, and he was as cordial and friendly as ever; and this was the serious thing — 'that I was Jekyll and Hyde! *Jekyll* in being successful at my work at the Admiralty — but *Hyde* as a failure in Society! that I talked too freely and was reported to say (which of course is a lie) that the King would see me through anything! that it was bad for me and bad for him as being a Constitutional Monarch; if the Prime Minister gave me my *congé*, he couldn't resist it, etc., etc.' . . . I told the King that if I had never mentioned His Majesty's name in my life, precisely the same thing would be said out of sheer envy of His Majesty being kindly disposed, and it could not be hid that the King had backed up the First Sea Lord against all kinds of opposition. As a matter of fact I *never* do go into Society, and only dine out when I'm worried to meet the King or Prince of Wales, and I'm not such a born idiot as to have said any such thing as has been reported to the King (*it's quite likely someone else has said it!*). Well, he left that (having unburdened his mind) and smoked a cigar as big as a capstan bar for really a good hour afterwards, talking of everything from China to Peru, not excluding *The Times* article on himself. . . .

Well, I won't bother you any more about the King. That was the salient point. Oh! he said something of how I worked the Press, but I didn't follow that up. No one knows, except perhaps yourself, that unless I had arranged to get the whole force of public opinion to back up the Naval Revolution, it would have been simply impossible to have carried it through successfully, for the vested interests against me were enormous and the whole force of Naval opinion was *dead* against me. But I did venture one humble remark to the King: 'Has anyone been able to mention to Your Majesty one simple item that has failed in the whole multitude of reforms introduced in the last 3½ years?' No! he said. No one had! So I left it there.

McKenna I had in my room here for 3 hours and Macnamara[1] for 4 hours, and they both kindly said they were convinced. McKenna said he was '*fascinated*,' and Macnamara said he was '*infatuated*'! McKenna asked for a second dose and got it. Macnamara sent me 'the story of his life'! I wrote McKenna a letter [No. 123]. I sent a copy to Francis Knollys, who showed it to the King and Prince of Wales. All three, I believe, think I was too stiff and dictatorial. . . .

If the Angel Gabriel were in my place, he would be falsely accused. I'm only surprised that the King hasn't been told worse things — perhaps he has! '*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*' I always have that thought, and hope the King will have a cottage somewhere in Windsor Forest or elsewhere which he will kindly give me when it happens, so that I can come over and have a yarn with dear you!

Yours,

J. F.

I've asked Lloyd George to dine on the 29th! I suppose you had better burn this letter!

125: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

May 5th, 1908
4:15 a.m.! The Early Bird!!!

My beloved E.,

Burn this when read. Yesterday with all Sea Lords present McKenna formally agreed to FOUR Dreadnoughts, AND IF NECESSARY SIX Dreadnoughts, next year (perhaps the greatest triumph ever known!). As he says, he has to eat every word he has said of the Treasury and Cabinet, but I am giving him some jam. He tells me Harcourt[2] for certain will resign on it. He (McKenna) funks Lloyd George (that's why I am writing to you!), and he, McKenna, is paring down the money with a view to Supplementary Estimates. Of course you'll not breathe a word of any of this to Lloyd George, but

[1] Thomas J. Macnamara, Liberal M.P., 1900-1924, and onetime educator, had succeeded Robertson as Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1908-1920. His energy, which won him the nickname of 'Fighting Mac', was appreciated by Fisher. 'Our new First Lord is A1, and so is Macnamara. At last we are blest with two fighters!' (Fisher to White, May 8th, 1908).

[2] Lewis (afterwards first Viscount) Harcourt, in the Cabinet as First Commissioner of Works, 1905-1910.

this is what I suggest to you to impress on Lloyd George. *Let there be no mistake about the two keels to one in Dreadnoughts! McKenna vacillating on this through funk of Lloyd George.* So let Lloyd George re-assure him and tell him to have no fear. It doesn't affect next year, as McKenna consents to 4 or even 6, but it does affect the year after, and the Admiralty finance should be arranged accordingly and not deplete next year at expense of year after.

I wonder if this is all clear to you that McKenna is going to give us the *numbers* for next year all right, but is wobbling over the money provision to the detriment of the year after. Shove in again the great fact the Navy and Army Estimates not far different in magnitude, and yet the Army can't fight Bulgaria and the Navy can take on the lot. '*Ut veniant omnes!!!*' The Army too big for a little war, too little for a big war! You might tell Lloyd George he can rely on my parsimony, but he should give McKenna the tip that he is going for 4 or 5 millions on the Army Estimates (not all at once, of course) to give it to Navy. Don't let Lloyd George go at the King like a bull at a gate. Francis [Knollys] must pave the way, and then let the Celtic eloquence come in!

You have a momentous job in hand now. Heaven help you.

Yours,

J. F.

126: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 16th, 1908

First Lord,

You and I can't have secrets from each other about the Navy, so I determine to send you the enclosed just come from Admiral Winsloe. The writer is the Captain of the battleship *Hibernia* in the Channel Fleet.[1] Buckle, the Editor of *The Times*, kindly let me know of a confidential communication he had received from Beresford's Society friends to the same effect. Thirdly, I received yesterday via a reliable source in the Channel Fleet that Beresford was about to cause '*a great upheaval*' and force the resignation of the First Sea Lord. How the '*upheaval*' is to be effected is not clear, but

[1] Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Cecil F. Lambert, commanding H.M.S. *Hibernia* (1908-1910), which was Custance's flagship.

what is clear is (as the tone of the enclosed letter indicates) that what really amounts to an incipient mutiny is being arranged in the Fleet. Beresford evidently thinks you will what is vulgarly called 'funk' his leaving and his stumping the Country, but, as Mr. Balfour told me, he would 'fizzle out' in a week! What the British Public never can stand is a man with a grievance!

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

127: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 26th, 1908

First Lord.

The enclosed is the state of the case in regard to War Plans submitted by Lord Charles Beresford.

J. F.

War Plans

Lord Charles Beresford assumed command of the Channel Fleet on the 15th April 1907.

At the end of April he attended at the Admiralty and received from the First Sea Lord copies of various detailed War Plans, consisting of 188 pages of print.

On the 8th May 1907 he wrote that he had been 'unable to find any papers relative to a plan of campaign to enable the Channel Fleet to take instant action if war had been declared with a foreign Naval Power,' and asked to be supplied with 'the plans of his predecessors'.

On the 13th May he attended at the Admiralty and handed to the First Sea Lord his comments on the War Plans, consisting almost entirely of complaints as to his own position, and abuse of Admiralty administration: e.g., he refers to the Home Fleet as 'a fraud upon the public and a danger to the Empire'.

At the same time he handed to the First Sea Lord 'a Sketch Plan of Campaign' prepared by himself.

On the same day (13th May) the Admiralty replied to Lord Charles' letter of the 8th *idem* to the effect that his predecessor (Sir

A. K. Wilson, who had been for six years in command of the principal fleet in Home waters) had been requested 'to re-arrange the War Plans on which he would have acted, so as to make them applicable to present conditions', the Fleets having been redistributed when he gave up command.

This produced an improperly worded reply from Lord Charles, and further correspondence on his part, the object of which was apparently to prove that neither the Admiralty nor Sir A. Wilson had ever had any War Plans.

On the 14th June 1907 Lord Charles asked 'whether their Lordships approve of the sketch plan of campaign I had the honour to present to them on Monday the 13th May'.

This letter was, however, crossed by an Admiralty letter of the same date conveying to Lord Charles Beresford the revised 'War Orders' (i.e., a general idea of the forces which would probably be placed under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet in various specified contingencies) and directing him 'to submit for their Lordships' approval the detailed plans for the carrying out of operations under the several contingencies of an outbreak of war with the powers indicated' in a certain portion of the letter. This same letter forwarded to him a 'Memorandum on War Plans' drawn up by Sir A. Wilson.

In reply to this Lord Charles wrote on the 27th June a letter containing the following passages:—

> It is manifestly impossible for me to submit 'detailed plans for the carrying out of operations under the several contingencies of an outbreak of war with the Powers indicated' unless I know what ships are available to carry these plans out, and where such ships are to be found . . . At present I have not the faintest idea as to the number of torpedo craft and submarines in Home Waters that are actually ready or where they are stationed, neither do I know what torpedo boats and submarines are at the disposal of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Home Ports for local defence. . . .
>
> It appears to me somewhat remarkable, when sending me 'Remarks on War Plans by Admiral of the Fleet Sir A. K. Wilson', that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty should not have referred in any way to my Remarks on War Plans, which are in their Lordships' possession, and given to them on my taking command of the Channel Fleet. At the present

moment, as neither Sir A. K. Wilson nor myself can have the faintest idea of the number and class of vessels that will be actually ready in the event of a sudden emergency, it seems redundant to make out definite plans, such plans being useless, unless there are means for making them effective. There are many points in Sir A. K. Wilson's Remarks that will be of infinite use to me when remodelling my sketch plan referred to.

An attempt was made to clear up the situation by an interview which took place at the Admiralty on the 5th July 1907 between the First Lord, First Sea Lord, and Lord Charles Beresford.

The same day, after this interview, a further letter was sent to him, terminating with another request for his proposed plan of campaign.

Shortly afterwards certain additions were made to the Channel Fleet, for which Lord Charles had been pressing, and on the 18th July he wrote:

> The new proposals with regard to the large addition to my command meet the dangers that I have submitted for their Lordships' consideration. I can now make out a plan of campaign on definite lines, and have a fleet in all units and component parts ready for instant action.

From that day to this, a period of ten months, no War Plans have been submitted by Lord C. Beresford. The only thing that has occurred in regard to them is that in January 1908, while Lord Charles was on sick leave at Claridge's Hotel, London, he asked privately that the Director of Naval Intelligence and one of his Assistants should visit him there and help him, to use his own words, 'to fog out' his War Plans. As this request seemed to indicate a misapprehension as to the functions of the Intelligence Department, a reply was sent to the effect that it would be preferable if he obtained this assistance from his own Chief of Staff.

Nothing else has been heard on the subject at the Admiralty.

128: TO MRS. J. A. SPENDER

May 28th, 1908

Don't hawk 'Nelson' herewith about the streets![1]

Dear Mrs. Spender,

'*I will*' (part of the marriage ceremony that!). Ritz, Wednesday, 1 p.m. Well! There's telepathy. I have your name written in pencil at daylight this morning (you don't know what that means!) to bring your dear husband on Friday, June 19, to Victoria Station, returning there 7.30 p.m. same day, to see the *Dreadnought* hit a fly at 5 miles off, and to see submarines and destroyers gambolling about! *So do come!*

Yours through thick and thin!

J. F.

I suppose you know you wore the prettiest dress at the Court! I've told everyone this!

The King has sweetly asked me to go to Russia with him, which is lovely, as the Queen has telegraphed for that Grand Duchess I am in love with to come and meet me!

129: TO LADY FISHER[2]

H.M. Yacht *Victoria & Albert*
[June 7th, 1908]

Dearest Kitty,

A King's Messenger goes at 3 p.m., so I send this by him. We had a horrible knocking about in the North Sea. Every one ill from the King downwards. I wasn't actually sick, but a horrible sick headache, which was worse.[3] The Queen lay on deck like a corpse!

[1] A print of the Nelson essay of 1905 referred to on p. 62.

[2] En route to Reval in the King's entourage. It was a memorable trip for Fisher, who wrote Ponsonby on June 14th: 'This last 10 days the happiest I ever spent!' The famous meeting at Reval between the King and the Tsar, June 9th-10th, in effect broadened the Anglo-French Entente into the Triple Entente.

[3] 'I wasn't sea-sick, but H.M. loved the idea of my being so! I wouldn't disappoint him for the world!' (Fisher to Esher, June 18th, 1908). But there is another version: 'Both the King and the Queen were good sailors, and stood the voyage better than some of the old sea-dogs' (Lee: *Edward VII*, II, 590). Fisher and Commodore (afterwards Admiral Sir) Colin R. Keppel, Commander of His Majesty's Yachts, were the only 'sea-dogs' present.

and Princess Victoria[1] beckoned me to her (when I went on deck in a quiet interval) and said she had been continuously sick and could not keep down a biscuit. Everything in my cabin went mad. The armchair went head over heels through the door and the teapot and milk jug emptied themselves on to my hairbrushes, and everything upset.

The Kiel Canal is quite lovely. The King sent for me to sit with him while he had his breakfast (he usually does this) and we talked away of everything. Now it's church and I must stop. . . .

I did wish myself on dry land yesterday! I look with horror to the trip back across the North Sea and would like to come back by train. . . .

Y.l.h.

J. F.

130: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

H.M. Yacht *Victoria & Albert*
Near Kiel
June 12th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

. . . *The visit has been a phenomenal success. Private.* The Emperor said, for instance, 'The whole atmosphere of feeling has altered', referring to his entourage having been previously largely anti-English and pro-German. The Emperor is simply like a child in his delight at being made Admiral of the Fleet. Princess Victoria, who is his bosom friend, told me that he had said to her how grateful he was. The King has just surpassed himself all round. Every blessed Russian of note he got quietly into his spider web and captured! The whole lot of them are now all dead-on for the Emperor coming to England, but he said to one of them, 'Don't let us hurry too much; we might spoil it.'

Personally, I had a lovely time, and I danced the 'Merry Widow' with the Czar's sister, which much tickled His Majesty. I said to my sweet partner in the middle of the dance, 'How about Siberia for me after this!' which sent her into hysterics. The King told me to try and remember I wasn't a Midshipman! However, I got through all right, and the Grand Duchess Olga felt herself like Herodias' daughter

[1] Princess Victoria, second of King Edward's three daughters.

[Salome] as they formed a ring all round us while we danced! and my head wasn't wanted on a charger![1]

The Emperor was greatly impressed by the *Minotaur*. He went all over her. He wanted to decorate the whole crew, but the King restrained him.

Prince Henry asked for *Minotaur* and *Achilles* and destroyers to remain at Kiel after the King left, as the German Fleet wish to entertain them. He gave me a long lecture as to how the German Navy loved us (I think it's the cobra that licks its prey all over before it swallows it!).[2]

The King used extremely bad language yesterday about some article he had just read in last Sunday's *Observer* about Beresford and Sir Percy Scott at Dover.[3] I told His Majesty I really know nothing about it. I mention it, as I expect he will let fly at you. I simply told him that in regard to Beresford I was absolutely in your hands and did not mean to say one word more. . . .

Yours very truly and in great haste,

J. A. Fisher

131: FROM THE GRAND DUCHESS OLGA

Gatchina [Russia]
June 17th, 1908

Dear Sir John,

This time I am not going to put off writing to you, till I am ashamed to begin — as I was last time, when I never thanked you for your photograph.

[1] W. T. Stead afterwards wrote: 'When the King went to Reval Admiral Fisher was the life of the party. I have heard from one who was present that he charmed everyone by the gaiety of his conversation, that he even succeeded in achieving the impossible by bringing a smile to the face of the Empress of Russia. But what I should most have liked to see was the dance which was improvised after the State Banquet, when the band struck up the waltz in "The Merry Widow". The Grand Duchess Olga and Admiral Fisher danced with their hands behind their heads, with all the brilliant company standing round the dancers, until they were tired. Then "Jacky" went on deck, and by requests, which were commands, he brought down the house by dancing a hornpipe in approved nautical fashion' ('Character Sketch. Admiral Fisher', *Review of Reviews*, February 1910). See No. 131.

[2] This meeting took place on June 7th, en route to Reval. Fisher, on his return, told Stead that Prince Henry had said, 'What we are afraid of is another Copenhagen' (cited in J. W. Robertson Scott: *The Life and Death of a Newspaper* [London, 1952], p. 162).

[3] The *Observer* (June 7th) had reported a fresh instance of the strained relations between Beresford and Scott. At the recent dinner given by the French Consul at Dover for the French President, Beresford and Scott were, according to the original programme, to have been seated together. This was discovered at the last moment, whereupon the seating arrangements had to be suddenly changed.

What a very nice time we spent at Reval, wasn't it? All our gentlemen — ministers, admirals and generals — were delighted with you, as you brought such an amount of frolic and jollity into their midst. They couldn't get over it and spoke about you and your dancing, anecdotes, etc., without end. I told them that even if they tried their very hardest, they would never reach anywhere near your level. I shall never forget the last evening, when you entertained Victoria, Brocklehurst,[1] and me with your solo performance. I hadn't laughed so much for ages! . . .

I remain yours truly,

Olga

132: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

July 12th, 1908

My beloved E.,

I've just got back from Dartmouth (I do wish you could have come! It's illuminating to see what these boys are!). I don't find the situation improved on my return. McKenna bargaining privately with Beresford via the Duke of Sutherland,[2] and McKenna meeting Lady Charles Beresford at Stafford House and *discussing with her* what proofs exist for 'running in' Scott! *It's all utterly wrong!* And with extreme adroitness Custance and others cloud the issue as between Beresford and myself by importing Scott into the case, and, what is really clever, they have avoided the fact of whether the signal to Scott was deadly or not by the red herring of improper communications to the Press by Scott! McKenna saw the King yesterday, but I don't know what passed. I suppose I had better not see the King, but he is probably getting poisoned. McKenna protests almost too much when he sees me, but I think he is not straight in having these parleyings via Sutherland. The danger is that a big agitation is being worked up that if Beresford goes I should also. *But what have I done wrong?*

Ever yours,

J. F.

[1] Major-General John F. Brocklehurst (afterwards first Baron Ranksborough), Equerry to Queen Alexandra, 1901-1910, Extra Equerry, 1910-1921.

[2] The fourth Duke of Sutherland. A letter of July 15th from Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Hugh Evan-Thomas, Naval Secretary to the First Lord (1905-1908), put the matter in a different light: 'From what the First Lord has told me, I don't think there is any reason whatever to think that he is doing anything else than loyally support you. He has told me of a message he has sent to Lord Charles through one of his (Lord Charles') active and influential friends [Sutherland], which makes me think quite the other way, and Lord Charles has been informed that the thing that is absolutely necessary at once is that his relations with the First Sea Lord should be immediately brought to those which are in accordance with his position, etc.'

133: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

July 28th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

Forgive me for putting some few things down on paper to make matters quite clear.

I. The Beresford-Scott business. The Admiralty cannot issue any memorandum explanatory of the signal incident without an enquiry, but an enquiry would re-open the whole scandal, or at all events a strong probability of so doing. Perhaps if nothing more is said, the matter will die out, but I rather expect Beresford will press you on this point. He ought to be satisfied by the removal of Scott, and an enquiry might prove Beresford's signal to have been rightly disobeyed by Scott. It is averred that Beresford made the signal to Scott that he was right in not obeying the signal. Supposing Beresford writes officially after you leave on Friday on this subject. I suggest the answer to be sent to him should be that this matter, having formed the subject of private communications between him and you, the correspondence has been forwarded to you, and you in reply will state that the matter necessarily cannot be dealt with by you till your return to Admiralty, and then *tempus edax rerum*!

II. The manœuvres.[1] That you will write a *private* letter to Sir A. K. Wilson to the effect that his great experience and acknowledged mastery of the subject has led the *Board* to the conclusion that it would be most advantageous to the Service if he would kindly undertake the review of the reports on the recent strategic exercises and favour the Board with his opinion as to the results, and any assistance he requires will of course be arranged for.

III. The falsehood gains increasing credence that I communicated the signal incident to *The Times*. As a matter of fact, I had no knowledge of it whatever till I saw it in *The Times*. It is also untrue that I had any conversation with or in any way inspired Thursfield as to the leading article in *The Times*.[2] This adroit lie (or lies) has clouded the main issue as between Beresford and myself, and he has again reiterated (confirming the Levée incident) that he will not shake hands with me. That being the case, how is cordial co-operation possible? A false charge is, therefore, widely promulgated

[1] The manœuvres between the Home Fleet and Channel Fleet, which had concluded on July 21st. Both admirals, Bridgeman and Beresford, claimed the victory.

[2] *The Times* had carried the story of the signal incident on July 7th. On July 8th there appeared a leading article on the disunion in the Navy, which briefly referred to the incident and made this principal point: that Beresford 'must be confronted with the historic alternative *se soumettre ou se démettre*'.

against me, and what the Cabinet or some members of it thought an inadvertence at the Levée is confirmed as a premeditated insult. Is it possible that this state of affairs can be allowed to continue? Every trivial action has to be studied and even who one talks to considered as perhaps being indictable! I think your advice is (as I understood it yesterday): '*Wait till October and the matter shall then be dealt with! As to the lies, leave them alone.*'

IV. *The Estimates.* Here I have an increasing fear of great trouble and a crisis. I am quite confident that the figure you have named to Lloyd George is inadequate, while he, on the other hand, boasts to Esher and myself separately he is prepared to go much further. Why not take him at his word? We must begin two new Dreadnoughts next June; that of itself means an addition of ¾ of a million. Vote 9 is half a million. It is inevitable, in view of known German action, to spend largely next year on guns and mountings (preferably at Woolwich) in anticipating requirements for 1911-12. *If not, there may be disaster.* I would not take a penny under four millions, and Esher told me last night, after a private lengthy conversation with Lloyd George, that this or, indeed, a larger sum would be forthcoming for the Navy. Also there are 6 cruisers, not 4 as in your paper to Controller (I expect you took my first paper instead of my second! when you made out memorandum to Controller). Also I fear there is not going to be the saving in coal that you anticipate.

I write all this, as you might properly say to me in November: 'You should have pressed all this on me in July, before I committed myself to Lloyd George'. I have given the strongest proofs of being an economist — hated of all men for it! But we have come to a stage when prudence would lay down six Dreadnoughts next year, *not four!* And if the Napoleonic spirit was in Lloyd George, and as the greatest 'coup' since the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, he would tell Lord Rothschild to buy the three Brazilian Dreadnoughts tomorrow for 6 millions, and *borrow* the money for it![1] I fear if you keep your figure at 2 millions you will have to face a very difficult position, and I don't see how to justify and support it. I think I have exhausted all I have to say, and it makes it clear to put it all on paper.

[1] The first Baron Rothschild. There were two dreadnoughts building for Brazil, the *Minaes Geraes* and *Sao Paulo* (laid down in 1907 by Armstrong, Whitworth and by Vickers, respectively, and completed in 1910). The third, the *Rio de Janeiro*, though ordered in 1907, was not laid down by Armstrong, Whitworth until 1911. Completed in 1913, it was sold by Brazil to Turkey (December 1913). But when war broke out in 1914, England exercised her right of pre-emption on the vessel. She was renamed the *Agincourt* and commissioned as a British warship. There was some apprehension in England, from the time the ships were ordered, that a hostile power would buy them from Brazil.

. . . Beresford more or less off his head, or at all events brainless and irresponsible for his language. How could one trust deep strategic and war secrets to such a man. *He is a danger where he is!*

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

134: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

July 29th, 1908

My beloved Friend,

. . . I am only writing to say that I think the King will like to hear that the Prime Minister spoke to me the other day about the Navy undertaking the airship business (*in which this country is lamentably behind*), and the Admiralty have agreed, on the clear understanding that we have absolutely a free hand as we had with the submarines, and this has been assented to, and I have handed the business over to Captain Bacon, who His Majesty will remember as the first Captain of the *Dreadnought* and who brought our submarines to their present pitch of perfection. The airship is curiously the same problem as the submarine — only one works in a compressible medium — the air — whilst the other in an incompressible medium, water! But they are both *pure* ships (and not carriages, as treated at present, and put into a coach-house), but must be anchored and worked like a navigable vessel. . . .

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

135: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

August 11th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

. . . Knollys telephoned the night before last that the King directed him to come and see me about Beresford, and I saw him for an hour yesterday. Beresford had again intimated he was going to resign. I told Knollys I didn't believe it. Knollys confessed he didn't either. The signal incident is being resurrected by Beresford to implicate me as the communicator to *The Times*, and the King wanted Knollys to find out all about it. Also all the Dukes and Duchesses being worked up by Beresford and attacking the King, so much so that His

Majesty thought it wise not to see me personally, as he had wished to, and Knollys was to explain this. So I said I wouldn't go to Carlsbad and the King couldn't come over to lunch with me, as he usually does, or write me to stay with him at Marienbad, as he usually does! However, I was to go and see His Majesty off at the station, which I did, and he quite spoilt it all by being more cordial than ever, and we had quite a long conversation, with Metternich[1] glaring at us. The Princess Victoria sent for me *à la* Nicodemus and said all much the same as Knollys[2]. . . .

I saw Hardinge yesterday, who said our Ambassador had not the least anxiety about Constantinople and the Military Attaché's alarm quite unfounded.[3] Repington seems to have been pretty busy in spreading the evil report and that the Admiralty were unprepared. I wonder when Haldane is going to pay him his 30 pieces of silver!

I am going down to Chatham Hospital to-morrow to see that splendid fellow, Lieutenant Graves, who faced almost certain death in going below in the submarine to stop the engines when the crew were suffocated. Porter, the Medical Director-General, wrote to me it would do him good, as he has intervals of consciousness, but he doesn't know his own mother. I suppose I'm going to be used as a sort of electric battery to give him a shock!

I am going to lunch with the Indomitables afterwards. They *all* have done well![4] I saw the Prince of Wales yesterday, who has gone mad about her and all on board her and wants everyone promoted. I think we might do the First Lieutenant next December. I promised him to mention this to you — Fountaine, the First Lieutenant's name.

[1] Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich, German Ambassador at London, 1901-1912, who in his last years in England worked hard, but unsuccessfully, to abate the naval rivalry.

[2] 'I had a private séance with Princess Victoria by her wish at Buckingham Palace, and she told me all Society being worked up against me, but the King and Queen and herself all solid as a rock in my favour, but "George [the Prince of Wales] rather wobbly, as he allows himself to be got hold of"; but I saw George to-day and he was exceptionally nice' (Fisher to Esher, August 10th, 1908).

[3] The new British Ambassador at Constantinople (1908-1913) was Sir Gerard Lowther (afterwards first Baronet), and the Military Attaché, at Constantinople and Athens (1905-1909), was Colonel (afterwards Brigadier-General Sir) H. C. Surtees. It may be that the Attaché feared that the Russians, with the anti-Russian Young Turks in power after the July revolution, might attempt a *coup de main* on Constantinople.

[4] The battle cruiser *Indomitable* had been used for the Prince of Wales's recent trip to Canada. She had gone straight from the builders' yard and made a record passage across the Atlantic. The Prince reported she had been 'a grand success in every way. She is indeed a grand ship and the finest steamer I have ever seen' (Prince of Wales to Fisher, August 5th, 1908). 'This victory of the *Indomitable* makes her designer Sir Philip Watts a proud man and shuts up his critic, that gas-bag Sir W. White' (Fisher to Knollys, August 5th, 1908). Colonel Watts was Director of Naval Construction, in succession to White, 1902-1912.

Hardinge told me the Germans were utterly flattened out at Constantinople, and the Bagdad Railway as dead as a doornail and England predominant. The Turks have always loved us in spite of Lord Salisbury saying we had put the money on the wrong horse! The worst and weakest Foreign Minister this country ever had and gave up Heligoland to the Germans for nothing.[1] He was as timid as a rabbit, and Bismarck was right when he said he was wood painted to look like iron!

Hardinge also said no hope whatever of altering the German shipbuilding programme, and he had heard of its being pressed on. The ugly feature to my mind is the increasing talk of war between Germany and England, and the last three numbers of the *Clarion*, which has a great circulation, are full of it. I thought the Socialists would be the last to join with Lord Cromer. A sudden gust of passion in Germany might sweep the Emperor off his legs, but it seems inconceivable. However, we've got to keep our powder dry and the North Sea occupied and a good Admiral, for it's on him and Providence that we depend.[2]

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

136: TO ARNOLD WHITE

August 15th, 1908

Private and Confidential

My dear Arnold White,

I am about starting on leave and must send you a few parting lines of gratitude before I start, as I don't want you to imagine I am unmindful of all your buffetings on my behalf!

Beresford is still Beresfording and Custance is still Custancing! All the Dukes and Duchesses have been shepherded into the Beres-

[1] The third Marquess of Salisbury, Conservative Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, 1885-1886, 1886-1892, 1895-1902, had declared in the House of Lords, January 19th, 1897, at the height of the Armenian atrocities: 'the parting of the ways was in 1853, when the Emperor Nicholas's proposals [for Turkish partition] were rejected. Many Members of this house will keenly feel the nature of the mistake that was made when I say that we put all our money upon the wrong horse. [Laughter.]' Fisher's second reference is to the fact that in 1890, without consulting the Admiralty, Salisbury had ceded Heligoland to Germany, in return for various concessions in Africa.

[2] This favourite of Fisher's goes back to Goschen's statement in the House of Commons, March 2nd, 1896. The First Lord declared that if several powers combined against England, which was not probable, the Government would put their trust 'in Providence and a good Admiral', because it was impossible to have a navy as large as all the navies of the world combined.

fordian fold and mutiny is being further organized in the higher ranks of the Service. The lower are staunch and un-knife-and-fork-able! However, the 'Right' always wins, I think, and I shall stop where I am till I am kicked out.

A gross lie has been propagated that I sent the original signal incident to *The Times*. I never knew anything whatever about it till I saw it in *The Times*! I think you have been kindly judicious in abstaining from any notice of it all.

I wrote to Parsons,[1] the inventor of the turbine, to congratulate him on the unprecedented feat of the *Indomitable* going straight from the builders' yard and making an Atlantic record, for invariably there are preliminary canters. I enclose his answer, *which please keep private*, as it will interest you to see that the Curtis turbine,[2] which the Germans are 'plunging' for, is inferior. It's a half-German, half-Yankee company, I believe. So my war cry is 'Vote for Parsons and home industries!'

The *Indomitable* really did what was claimed for her, 25.13 knots, as I went to Chatham and overhauled her logs and registers, but I don't propose to give any official statements, as they would be of use to the Germans. I've no doubt your clear mind sees what the *Indomitable* means. I should have none else myself! and said so when she was designed, the same time as *Dreadnought*, but I was in a minority of one! *You had to have Moses before Paul! You couldn't have had the New Testament without the Old first!* The *Dreadnought* paved the way to the *Indomitable*. It's no use one or two knots superiority of speed — a dirty bottom brings that down! It's a d—d big six or seven knots surplus that does the trick! THEN you can fight HOW you like, WHEN you like, and WHERE you like! But what babes one has to deal with!

Yours,

J. F.

This is an excellent article by Stead, written off his own bat.[3] He has done great service by the way he has stood out for a big Navy. The [1907 Hague] Peace Congress kicked him out, I believe, but he

[1] Charles (afterwards Sir Charles) A. Parsons, whose revolutionary steam turbine (invented in 1884, adapted to marine use in 1897) superseded the reciprocating steam engine in the first years of the twentieth century – in England, the United States and elsewhere.

[2] Charles G. Curtis, the American inventor, whose competing steam turbine (1896) was installed in many British merchant and naval vessels, and in many American, and especially German and Japanese, warships.

[3] W. T. Stead: 'The Conning Tower of the Empire' (*Westminster Gazette*, August 10th), dealing with the significance of the adoption of wireless in the Navy.

sticks to his cry, 'Two keels for one'! He's a strange man, but the sacred fire burns in him as in you and Garvin, and all three of you so diverse! . . .

137: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Hotel Kurhaus
Tarasp [Switzerland]
August 26th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I have just got your letter of August 22.[1] I also have had a wild letter from Lambton as to a mixed armament versus the Dreadnought. I have replied to him I only wish it were true that none else had Dreadnoughts but ourselves and that he and Custance and others were left alone by Garvin and others in their zeal for Dreadnoughts! I even almost hope the battle practice by a judicious favouritism of the secondary armament may serve to disparage the one-gun principle! If only we can keep our secrets, we shall get that long way ahead which makes '*the stern chase a long chase*', as the sailors say!

I spoke to Watts about [the] Curtis turbine. Of course he of all others hankers after it for the very reason you give in your letter — as permitting so easily what he has so much at heart: a 13½-inch-gun ship of 10 guns without getting to huge dimensions. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

138: TO KING EDWARD

Tarasp
August 29th, 1908

. . . Woods Pasha, who is Naval A. D. C. to the Sultan,[2] came to see me just before his return to Constantinople the other day and

[1] In which McKenna spoke of a letter from Vice-Admiral Sir Hedworth Lambton, Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron, 1908-1910. Lambton, 'being in Japanese waters, takes the opportunity to read afresh the wholly irrelevant lessons of the Russian War, and talks of the "endless stream of 6-inch shell which demoralized the Russians at Tsushima". He makes no observations on the number, rapidity, or accuracy of fire of the 12-inch guns at the time of the war'. McKenna also was 'not yet quite easy about Curtis's turbine' because of the great economy in space as compared with the Parson turbine.

[2] Woods Pasha (Admiral Sir Henry Woods) had entered the Turkish naval service in 1870 and assisted in the reorganization of the Turkish Fleet.

told me a great deal about the Sultan (in whose confidence he is) and of his courage and astuteness and how wonderfully he has engineered the whole business of the Revolution![1] All the diplomatists of Europe are mere babies compared to him! Just as they thought they had cornered him over Macedonia and the German Emperor thought he had the Bagdad Railway in his pocket, the wily old Sultan wipes them all out and goes about in the crowd at Stamboul with a red and white rosette in his button-hole to signify he is a 'Young Turk' and the Friend of Liberty! With all deference to Your Majesty's opinion, I think it's splendid! And I told Woods Pasha to tell the Sultan I was quite ready to come if Your Majesty approved! (but I wouldn't stand in Beresford's way). . . .

The other letter I enclose about General Booth's deputy in the Salvation Army[2] is worth Your Majesty's passing notice because this Bramwell Booth is a great man as well as a man of peace! Personally I cannot conceive such utter madness as the Germans making war on England, but no human being (as Lord Salisbury said to me once when he was Prime Minister) can forecast what some great gust of popular passion may not sweep a nation into doing! . . .

I am Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

139: TO ARNOLD WHITE

August 30th, 1908

Private and Confidential

My dear Arnold White,

Your letter about Bramwell Booth and the German merchant at Frankfurt was not only interesting, but it was extremely valuable to me *and most opportune*, as I was replying to a letter from a high personage and it came in most handy. Nevertheless, one cannot conceive such German madness as to make war against England, for that Frankfurt merchant is right: it would be the collapse of the German Empire and the forerunner of that great and impending bulwark against both the Yellow man *and the Slav* — 'THE FEDERATION OF ALL WHO SPEAK THE ENGLISH TONGUE!' However, as to such a war, no one can predict what some great gust of popular passion might not

[1] In the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 Abdul Hamid was able to keep his throne by posing as a liberal and restoring (July 24th) the Constitution of 1876.

[2] William Bramwell Booth, Chief of Staff of the Salvation Army, 1880-1912, later its General, 1912-1929, in succession to his father, 'General' William Booth. See the following letter.

drive the German nation into doing, and Wilhelm would joyfully place himself at the head of any great popular ecstasy, for he is a veritable Tudor in gauging the popular will as to when he can dictate and when he must follow!

Have you seen M. Rousseau in *Le Temps*? I have not — only this extract. He is speaking of the English Navy: 'We are lost in admiration of this gigantic organization for war, concentrated, held in leash, ready to be launched towards any point of the horizon'. And the newspaper goes on to say that 'in studying the British Fleet his admiration is divided between the efficiency of the matériel and the brilliancy of the administrative organization behind it'! This is M. Hanotaux over again, who spoke similar words when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs!

How true, what you once wrote me long ago, that one has to go to France and Germany to realize what Mahan so trenchantly writes — that 86 per cent of the British guns are trained on Germany! But 'lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of these revelations, there has been vouchsafed to me a thorn in the flesh' in the shape of Beresford! (N. B. I've corrected the above words, as you will see by referring to the 12th chapter of the second book of Corinthians and the 7th verse!)

I am enjoying a vacant mind and the total absence of either the English or the American tongue. I am 36 miles from the nearest railway and one thousand miles from the Admiralty. No motors are allowed by the Government, only cart horses, so I took 7 hours to come those 36 miles — and no tourist will face it! The sun is shining, the sky is blue, and the mountains close to me are white as wool with snow. I never paid anyone such a compliment in my life as writing this letter to you at this time of paradise.

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

J. F.

140: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

Savoy Westend Hotel
Carlsbad
September 8th, 1908

My blessed Friend,

Three things to say to you which I hope I shall remember and no answer required! It's not good for the cure to have a busy mind, so I will make it as short as possible. (*It's delightful having a vacant mind!*)

I. The new Yacht. You will have heard the King's present idea (which further reflection convinces me as still more excellent than I thought at first!) to have a smaller vessel than the present nondescript proposed yacht, which is too big to go to little places and too little to go to big places. . . .

II. The King showed me letters from Beresford. I suggested to His Majesty that the reply thereto should be 'that the King feels quite assured that the Board of Admiralty will do all that is right in the matters he mentions.' *I never read such blatant bosh in my life as he has written to me! The sum of it all is that the Board of Admiralty consists of idiots and Beresford is the one and only man!* As the King most truly said, 'His overweening vanity and love of notoriety are simply intolerable.' But it's better to have him in the Mediterranean than in Parliament. In the Mediterranean we can sit upon him — in Parliament no one can! I have sent him a regular 'nasty one' yesterday in answer to his two outrageous letters to me received since I saw the King. In the official reply Beresford's attention will be called to the fact that officers of '*perhaps* (!) as great a repute as himself (Sir A. K. Wilson and Sir W. May) do not share his views nor write to their Lordships in a tone that is unbecoming and in a sense that the facts don't justify'!!! and it will be added, 'Their Lordships know exactly what they want done and intend to have it done and will not brook any opposition'.

I have got water on the brain and can't for the life of me remember the third thing I wanted to tell you. . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

141: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

September 8th, 1908

My beloved E.,

It's the plain truth that I have been intending to write to you for 10 days, but brilliant weather, heavenly air, and 70[1] in the shade by the side of a rushing snow river have combined to part me from you, but I now return to you! 'The heart untravelled fondly turns to home.'[1] We have no poets nowadays like Pope, Goldsmith, and Gay

[1] Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee;
Still to my brother turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain.
From Goldsmith: 'The Traveller' (1764).

— only damned mystical idiots like Browning and Tennyson that want a dictionary and the differential-calculus sort of mind to understand what they are driving at!

I haven't seen the *Nation.*[1] Lord Eversley behaved most disgracefully to me! Even Robertson, M.P., thought it shameful! . . . Eversley stopped me in the Park and I mentioned to him '*hysteria navalis*' and that we were 4 times stronger than the Germans on any basis you liked to take! I'm d—d if he didn't go and tell Massingham, the Editor of the *Nation* [1907-1923], and he (Eversley) also wrote an article quoting my private conversation. (Soon one will say casually, 'What a fine day!' and then have to add, 'For God's sake, don't tell anyone I said so!') A strange thing!

I sat several times between Stolypin, the Russian Prime Minister [1906-1911], and Isvolsky, the Foreign Secretary.[2] I didn't begin it, but Stolypin said to me, 'What do you think we want most?' He fancied I should answer, 'So many battleships, so many cruisers, etc., etc.,' but instead I said: 'Your Western Frontier is denuded of troops and your magazines are depleted. *Fill them up*, and then talk of Fleets!' Please see enclosure from Kuropatkin's secret report: '*The foundation of Russia's safety is her Western boundary*'!!![3] . . .

Yours ever,

J. F.

[1] The first Baron Eversley, a onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1856) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty (1871-1874), was noted for his opposition to increased armaments. His article, 'Useless Naval Expenditure' (*Nation*, September 5th), was in the usual vein and made this principal point: 'It is thus in the direction of non-fighting ships [surveying vessels, small coastguard craft, etc.] and their crews, and of redundant men in barracks on shore, that there appear to be great opportunities for reduction of unnecessary expenditure, without any loss of real strength of the Navy.'

[2] The occasion appears to have been a lunch given by the King at Marienbad on September 3rd.

[3] Stolypin 'looked hard at me and said not another word. I FELT I had got home!' (Fisher to White, November 2nd, 1908). General Alexei N. Kuropatkin was onetime Russian Minister of War (1898-1904) and Commander-in-Chief of the Russian forces in the Far East in the first year of the Japanese War. He had entered this note (not a 'secret report') in his diary on June 26th, 1903: 'If I were asked to express an opinion, from a military point of view, upon the comparative importance of Russian interests in different parts of the Empire, and on different frontiers, I should put my judgment into the form of a pyramidal diagram, placing the least important of our interests at the top and the most important at the bottom, as follows.' The pyramid that followed had 'Our interests in Korea' at the top and, in sixth place, at the bottom: 'Maintenance of the territorial integrity of Russia against the Powers of the Triple Alliance. The foundation of Russia's safety in her western boundary.' These notes are to be found in Kuropatkin's *The Russian Army and the Japanese War* (abridged ed., 2 vols., London, 1909), I, 185. Fisher must have had a translation of the passage from the Russian original (*Otchet Kuropatkina*), which had appeared in four volumes in 1904-1906 but which had been suppressed immediately on publication.

By the way, I've got Sir Philip Watts into a new *Indomitable* that will make your mouth water when you see it! (and the Germans gnash their teeth!)[1]

142: TO SIR PHILIP WATTS

September 17th, 1908

My dear Watts,

Kindly send me a few lines to say whether any bright flashes of your genius have further illumined our very fast big-gun battle cruiser *Indomitable*. We want to see her live! Let us call her the 'Sanspareil'! But if we have to accept fewer guns, then let us call her the 'Incompatible.' For it will not be compatible with our brilliant progress if we do no more than just separate the midship guns, which practically is all that a fewer-gun ship will give us in the shape of improvement.

If we go to work the same way as we did with *Dreadnought*, we shall succeed, because so obviously silly to refuse an increase of 25 per cent of power in the 'Sanspareil', with only an increase of 4 per cent in cost and 5 per cent in displacement and to go into all the same docks (save one out of three at Malta) as the 'Incompatible.' (*You must please correct my percentages above when you reply.*) If you remember, the opposition succumbed at once against *Dreadnought* when it was seen that such an increase of power resulted from so small an increase in expense and displacement.

Nothing like short facts to carry conviction. A long-winded argument no use — the beginning of it is forgotten before the end is reached!

'The best is the cheapest.'
'The British Navy only travels First Class.'
'It ain't numbers, it's quality.'

And a few more words of Solon like that should be hung on the walls of the Board Room at the Admiralty. . . .

It's quite impossible to refute the arguments for the 'Indomitable' class, because their speed — their big fat margin of 5 or 6 knots of

[1] The *Indomitable* was a sister ship of the *Invincible*. The 'new *Indomitable*' had by the following spring evolved into the battle cruisers *Lion* and *Princess Royal* of the 1909-1910 building programme: 26,350 tons (as against 17,250 of the *Indomitable*), with a main armament of eight 13.5-inch guns (as against eight 12-inch), and a maximum speed of 30 knots (as against 27 knots).

speed — permits them to do just what they damn please and fight *any one* and not care whether their bottoms are dirty or whether they have an extra 1,000 tons of coal on board: the whacking big excess of speed makes them absolutely independent. Any silly fool in the street can see this, but naval experts with enormous brains can't! Perhaps you will remember it is stated by St. Paul that the foolish of this world often confute the wise!

Yours,

J. F.

143: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM MAY

Botzen [South Tyrol]
September 28th, 1908

My dear May,

Many thanks for your letter of September 23rd, and I am so glad to hear that the battle practice is going so much better; also that you have been through the English and German shipbuilding programmes with Slade. What has to be guarded against is any statement that cannot be thoroughly substantiated by official German figures. . . .

For myself, without going into any figures whatever, and without the slightest regard for anyone's opinions or having the least consideration for any shipbuilding comparisons, I prefer to take the ground that our maximum output of large armoured ships is six annually, as incontestably proved by the Controller's statement; therefore we cannot afford to build *4* this year on the basis of building *8* next year, should the Germans not abate but increase their efforts; and consequently the *safe* and *right* thing is to build *six* next year, and slack down afterwards if Germany slacks down. *Also* we want to establish and maintain our superiority in the new type of large armoured ships, and cannot be content with a bare margin of strength over Germany, *this being vital to our national existence.* All this requires to be temperately and carefully set forth in the statement to be prepared by the Director of Naval Intelligence for the Board. . . .

Yours,

J. A. Fisher

144: TO KING EDWARD

September 29th, 1908

Sir John Fisher's humble duty to Your Majesty, and the enclosed letter just received from Woods Pasha . . . He came to see me in London just as I was coming abroad and, knowing his intimacy with Kiamil Pasha, the Grand Vizier,[1] I asked him to let me have his impressions. It was a most excellent stroke with the Turks the Grand Vizier being alluded to in Your Majesty's telegram to the Sultan, for when I met Kiamil at Smyrna in 1900, when he was Governor-General there, he told me if he ever got the opportunity he meant to bring back the old days of Turkey's entire and sole reliance on England as being the one and only Power that had never made anything out of Turkey, and the one and only Power that by reason of her Fleet would best aid Turkey, and that Turkey could do more for England than any other Power, because of England's enormous Mohammedan population and Egypt, and Kiamil in saying all this to me 8 years ago spoke Gospel truth. I don't send Your Majesty Sir Henry Wood's (he is a K. C. V. O.) enclosures, as they are purely technical, and propose telling him in reply his suggestions are good, but as no action can be possibly taken for some time, it will be best to wait and not wise for anyone connected with the British Admiralty to offer advice unless asked officially. . . .

Only two wet days since I left England, and wearing my thinnest clothes, and the grapes like those from the Promised Land which Joshua and Caleb brought back to Moses — two pence a pound. And the Austrian hotels seem to me the best in the world.

I am Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

145: TO ALEXANDER P. IZVOLSKY

[Admiralty, Whitehall]
October 15th, 1908

Private and Secret

You were very kind to me last night in your frankness, and I feel impelled to put my humble views on paper for your favourable consideration. I think you are assured that I have been a consistent

[1] Kiamil Pasha, Turkish Grand Vizier (Prime Minister), 1881-1887, 1896, 1908-1909, 1912-1913.

advocate of England's utmost friendship with Russia. Since I came to Admiralty as First Sea Lord, just four years ago, I have always maintained from a sailor's point of view for fighting purposes that what we wanted was a Quadruple Alliance — Russia, England, France, and Turkey, and each of the four Powers would benefit. Each gains. I need not give you the reasons, they are so obvious. I urged all this in October 1904, when it was very unpopular to do so, but, thank Heaven, it is all coming round to this blessed consummation.

I was equally opposed to the Japanese Alliance, and still am. The very worst thing that England ever did for herself! You can also see this was not a popular thing for me to advocate, and again, thank Heaven, it is gradually dawning on the English mind that we were wrong. The reasons for this also are too obvious to need being told to you. I am only speaking from the fighting point of view.

Now I come to this point: The biggest mistake possible just now would be for either Russia or England to alienate or weaken the Turks. If they both get nothing whatever out of the Turks, then Russia will be as much in favour with Turkey as England just now. Again, if a word now spoken about the Dardanelles, there would be a great agitation in England. Wait some little time, and then let Russia make her own private arrangement with a grateful Turkey, and you may rest quite sure that England won't then object — for the simple reason that anything that will bind Russia, England, and Turkey together is to England's advantage and far outweighs any objections to what Russia naturally and rightly wishes in regard to the Dardanelles.

I fear you will think it very presumptuous of me to write all this, but I am certain that English opinion is not yet ripe just yet to say anything about the Dardanelles, and it would alienate the Turks and allow other people to come into the discussion, whereas later on it can be done between Russia and Turkey.

On June 26, 1903, your General Kuropatkin wrote that 'the foundation of Russia's safety is her Western boundary'. It's the same menace that Russia has to fear in the Anatolian [Bagdad] Railway, and the absolute certainty that the Heir to the Austrian Throne[1] will work fully and absolutely with the German Emperor.

The Quadruple Alliance of Russia, England, France, and Turkey is an obvious necessity for all four Powers. I only write as a sailor

[1] The ill-fated Archduke Francis Ferdinand, nephew of the Emperor Francis Joseph, assassinated at Sarajevo, Bosnia, on June 28th, 1914.

from the fighting point of view and as an onlooker, and I hope you will forgive my presumption in writing to you, but I happen to know the Grand Vizier (Kiamil Pasha), and years ago we talked all this over when I was Admiral in the Mediterranean and he was the Vali [Governor] at Smyrna, dreaded by the Sultan but worshipped by his countrymen.

Please consider this strictly private and only written with a desire to be of service, and please don't trouble to answer.

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

146: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
October 28th, 1908

Private and Confidential
Dear Mr. McKenna,

In case of any delay in the resumption of our conversation of yesterday, I am anxious both to assure you of my sense of your kindness and to remove any impression that I wish 'to lag superfluous on the stage'. My only desire is to avoid the wreckage of the various arrangements now in progress, all of which, I am convinced, are for the good of the Navy, and the next two years will make them safe, and only for that reason had I any desire to wait the time of my retirement.

On the other hand, I appreciate fully the advantages of disappearing like Elijah before the usual course of events gives a fixed date to one's departure. I find I was right in my recollection that in recent years Sir F. Richards was $5\frac{3}{4}$ years First Sea Lord and Sir Cooper Key *5 years and 11 months* [1879-1885]. Further back there were longer periods of 6, 7, and 8 years, but that is ancient history. However, the real limit is the period of cordial harmony between the First Lord and First Sea Lord. There is no other condition.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

147: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 2nd, 1908

Private and Secret
My dear Arnold White,

. . . The King sent for me to stay with him[1] and 'docked' my holiday a fortnight. As H.M. said, 'The mice were beginning to play while the cat was away', and H.M. was right, but I need not trouble you with that story. . . .

When Isvolsky came here recently, I (being a mere nobody) was astounded at his confidence and astounding confessions to me, and Benckendorff, the Ambassador, took me to the door of my carriage. As they were so free with me, I was equally free with them. *Vide* my letter enclosed [No. 145], but I felt I was writing to Stolypin, as Isvolsky is only a frightened rabbit. Stolypin is the man — a Gladstone in his courage. . . .

I am getting sick and meditating a sudden and unexpected departure *à la* Elijah, but I am not going to jeopardize. I shall look out to have Elisha standing right under, so that the mantle may not miss! *All this deadly private*, but I am getting really wearied out with all the flabby 'blue funkers' all around one who parley with mutiny and don't see that the great swelling tide of the masses will come in with a roar for an irresistible Navy — and Territorial Army and all the rest d—d rot!

Two wise men, the old Sultan and the Austrian Emperor, said in December 1899 that the British Fleet the ONLY SOLE preventive at that date of a big European war. Wilhelm's boomerang[2] confirms it, and Garvin is right to-day in saying 'Ships, ships, ships' in *Observer*! . . .

Please return enclosed and don't talk in your sleep of what I have written.

Ever yours,

J. F.

[1] At Balmoral, October 5th until the 9th or 10th.

[2] The famous interview given by the Emperor to an anonymous correspondent which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, October 28th, 1908. He complained bitterly of the way he was misunderstood in England ('You English are mad, mad as March hares'), but while protesting his friendship for Great Britain, he tactlessly intimated that this feeling was not shared by the great majority of his subjects. He repeated that the German Navy was not a menace to England. The immediate effect of this indiscretion in England was an almost unanimous demand in the navalist press for more dreadnoughts.

148: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING[1]

[mid-November 1908]

My dear Goulding,

Here is my crude paper, five years old, — written *currente calamo* — only meant for my colleagues! *Believe me that 'invasion' is a red herring!* We want an Army to *attack*, not one to *defend*! A 'DEFENCE' Army means the end of England! For then it's not '*invasion*' — it's 'STARVATION'! There is only ONE defence and *one only* for our Empire! '*The command of the sea*'! Don't imperil that by filching money that ought to be used for the Navy in bolstering up an Army that is sworn not to go away from their homes! (This is private, as I should be burnt at the stake if known.) We want a sea-going Army that we can launch forth anywhere AT AN HOUR'S NOTICE! *Not 6 months!* The Territorial Army will require 6 months' training after mobilizing to be efficient. The German Emperor is right — 'the British Public are *mad*, *mad*, *mad*, mad as March hares!'

I didn't tell you the half I might have about war! Let us have another lecture! One blessing, I don't believe I once turned my back on Miss Goulding! . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

149: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 21st, 1908

Private and Confidential
My dear Arnold White,

You've given me a great blow about Esher. I can't believe it! I think I *must* say '*I won't!*' He has stood by me utterly to his own disadvantage. (*Vide* the German Emperor!)

Gwynne, the Editor of the *Standard* and the voice tube of Beresford, got 8 sheets presented to Asquith at Windsor why I should be hung.

[1] Edward A. Goulding (afterwards first Baron Wargrave), Conservative M.P., 1895-1906, 1908-1922, 'a staunch friend and a PATRIOT' (Fisher on a letter of 1911 from him). This letter may have been prompted by Lord Roberts's notice, on November 9th, to raise a debate on invasion in the House of Lords. Since the C.I.D. findings on invasion had not been made public immediately, and since Roberts, who knew them, was not at all satisfied, invasionist agitation had not ended. Roberts made a strong statement on the invasion problem in the House of Lords on November 23rd.

Asquith asks Admiral Bosanquet, late Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, at Windsor in attendance on King of Sweden, to dissect the 8 pages. He promptly damns them and substantiates to Asquith's complete satisfaction the outrageous mutiny raging behind these pages — so they have been hoist with their own petard! Cawdor told me he had sent Ampthill a 'sneezer.'[1] Also Cawdor, at last Navy Club dinner, with Beresford sitting next him, made a magnificent onslaught on Beresford and mutiny! . . .

Don't bother to answer. I am upset over Esher, 'mine own familiar friend whom I trusted'. Who the devil is one to trust?

Yours,

J. F.

150: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

November 27th, 1908

My beloved E.,

. . . As to your fears in regard to McKenna, all I can say is that should he act as you think possible, he will be an inconceivable villain, from what he has said and *is always saying* to me and his invariable cordiality and support, *which has never faltered!* But I know you have always had a 'profound distrust' of him, and, curiously, others share it! I have to confess that! Have you anything to go on?

The more I think over it, the more satisfied I am that I am wise to do Elijah next King's Birthday (*provided Elisha is ready!*). That will forestall any such *black treachery* as you have in your mind! Only you and dear Knollys know of my idea and I think it's best kept secret, as opposed to the view I first held of putting it in writing to McKenna and the King. *Anyhow, let's first see what happens about Beresford!* He's as quiet as a mouse now! I am not going to say one word. There is now personal animosity between McKenna and Beresford, and McKenna calls him a liar! But this doesn't count if political expediency says otherwise! . . .

Yours,

J. F.

[1] Lieutenant-Colonel the second Baron Ampthill, commanding the 3rd Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment, 1908-1916, and active in the organization of the Territorial Army. A 'sneezer' is a colloquialism for 'something exceptionally good, great, strong, violent, etc., in some respect'.

151: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

December 19th, 1908

Dear Mr. McKenna,

It has been arranged for Winsloe to be at Admiralty soon after 11 a.m. to-day, and after seeing us he will send a note to the Cabinet stating his views, which you can safely anticipate as being in perfect accordance with the other Sea Lords. You probably quite appreciate the advantage of not allowing it to be supposed that the Sea Lords are dominating the situation and that the real truth should be stated that you, yourself, being convinced from your own enquiries, have led the whole Board to the unanimous decision arrived at during their last Board meeting, and that *they intend to stand by you!* If, however, there is to be any reference to the Sea Lords, I think the witness should be the Controller,[1] as being the responsible date giver, but I venture to anticipate your own opinion that to give any colour to what will be seized on with avidity that you are being led instead of really leading (*which last is the truth and as it should be*) will be disastrous to the Sea Lords, because of the inevitable resentment at their being masters, not servants. So I hope you will play the game off your own bat, quoting the *whole* Board as being absolutely with you and *no compromise* possible because we have gone to *the very minimum*. Indeed, my conversation with Jellicoe makes me most anxious whether we are doing enough in view of German possibilities; but you stated those possibilities with such extreme clearness and force that I need not repeat them. I must congratulate you on your mastery of the details.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

152: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 21st, 1908

Private and Confidential

Dear Mr. McKenna,

In reply to my inability to lunch with him, Winston wants now to know if there is *any time* I could see him to-day, and I've replied

[1] Jellicoe was Third Sea Lord and Controller, 1908-1910, in succession to Jackson.

(what is the truth) that I am engaged all the afternoon with Ottley on a strategic discussion about the Baltic and Denmark and the Belts which I cannot defer; but he is evidently very bent on seeing me (for some evil purpose, I fear!). I shall of course be sure to keep you informed and, as you advise, I shall maintain an impenetrable reserve as to our inner life at the Admiralty, except I am going to emphasize the fact that never had we a more united Board or a stronger First Lord, and shall quote my colleagues' words to that effect. I think this is only fair to say this to disabuse Winston's mind of any idea of our faltering in our loyal support of our Chief.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

153: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

December 22nd, 1908

Private and Confidential

My dear Knollys,

It may be useful for the King to know exactly how this Beresford Crisis has been precipitated, and I am so *very very* glad that His Majesty is so quite apart from it all *and can* remain apart from it all! as Beresford's removal is a purely administrative act carried out entirely on the First Lord's own initiative and on his own sole responsibility with the full sanction of the Prime Minister!

This is the brief history of the case:—Since the manœuvres in the summer there have been numerous interviews between McKenna and Beresford. The result was that McKenna told me that he had come to the conclusion that Beresford was a liar and incompetent — *I never said a word.* Then the Casablanca incident occurred.[1] Grey came over and said we were on the very brink of war. McKenna came to me and said for the very first time in his life he had been awake all night. I told him I had slept soundly because Sir A. Wilson would have to be appointed Commander-in-Chief. He had a second sleepless night and then said he had been to the Prime Minister and told him that he, McKenna, as a pure civilian, saw the unfitness of Beresford for War Command and must get rid of

[1] On September 25th, 1908, the French had forcibly recaptured three German deserters from the French Foreign Legion who were being assisted in their escape by the German consulate in Casablanca. The resulting Franco-German crisis, in which the English supported the French, did not end until mid-November, when it was agreed to refer the question to arbitration.

him, so he invented the two-years letter, applying to both Beresford and Bridgeman, so the three Fleets at home — the Channel Fleet, the Home Fleet and the Atlantic Fleet — are all three now made 2-years' appointments, reverting to the old custom of the Channel Fleet only being held for 2 years. No answer has come from Beresford. Walter Long is staying with him on board his flagship. Walter Long hopes to be First Lord of the Admiralty and is mugging up the Navy.[1] Beresford is his prophet and his First Sea Lord! I shall be very glad if the King does not see either McKenna or myself, as then it shows that it is all a pure routine business with which His Majesty is not concerned.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

If Beresford can sling mud he will, *but he can't!*

[1] That is, Long was learning as much as possible of the Navy in a short time.

CHAPTER II

A NAVY SCARE, AN INQUIRY, AND RETIREMENT, 1909-1910

ON December 18th, 1908, Asquith informed the King that the marked acceleration in the German shipbuilding rate had led the Admiralty to propose six, instead of four, dreadnoughts for 1909-1910. The situation was as follows: the first two German dreadnoughts had been authorized in 1906, and three more had been authorized in 1907 (of which one was a battle cruiser). Four of these five big ships had been laid down in August 1907, the fifth in March 1908. Under the supplementary German Navy law of 1908, four more (including a battle cruiser) were scheduled for 1908 (laid down in November 1908), and again in 1909. This made a grand total of thirteen German capital ships building and projected, and expected to be ready in 1912, although not one was actually in commission in March 1909. This was the British position early in 1909: ten dreadnoughts and battle cruisers built or building, plus the two authorized in the 1908 estimates, plus the six the Admiralty wanted in the 1909 estimates, would give England eighteen big ships in 1912. Eighteen to thirteen would be hardly a two-power standard in dreadnought-type ships. But worse still — and this is the crucial factor, which explains the Navy scare that developed and the Admiralty's insistence on a minimum programme of six — it was believed that for a certainty the Germans would have seventeen by the spring of 1912, and that they *might* have twenty-one. How? Through an acceleration of the German programme.

What evidence was there of acceleration? From official and private sources the Admiralty learned that there had been a great increase in Krupp's productive facilities for gun-mountings, which would give the Germans the capacity to build eight big ships a year, and that the German Government had recently secretly purchased an 'unusually large amount of nickel', and the main use of nickel was for the construction of guns, armour, and gun-mountings. The Admiralty also had information that the materials for the capital ships building had been collected in advance of their laying down, and that, in similar fashion, the four big ships of the 1909 programme had been anticipated. 'Hence,' as McKenna summarized the mat-

ter, 'the terms of the Law are no guide to the dates when the ships will be completed. We are bound therefore to look at the German capacity to build, and we can best judge what they can do by what they are doing.'[1]

Taking all factors into consideration, it was regarded by the Sea Lords as a 'practical certainty' that Germany would have seventeen capital ships by the spring of 1912, not thirteen, as in the official schedule. This was based on the assumption that the four dreadnoughts of the 1910 programme would be started in the autumn of 1909. There was a 'possibility' that Germany would have twenty-one capital ships ready by the latter date, if she used her full shipbuilding capacity without financial restriction.

The Admiralty's revised recommendation (January 1909) was that two big ships be added to the 1909-1910 programme for a total of eight, with the last two to be laid down at the end of March 1910. The Sea Lords considered this to be of 'the utmost importance'. But the Admiralty quickly ran into a stone wall: two Cabinet Ministers in particular, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, were unable to agree with McKenna and his professional advisers that a dangerous situation would exist in 1912. They did not believe that Germany was building dreadnoughts secretly in excess of the 1900 law. Four dreadnoughts in the 1909 estimates would be enough to ensure adequate British superiority in 1912. The big-navy group in the Cabinet, led by McKenna and Grey, was equally adamant on six dreadnoughts. The Sea Lords were ready to resign on a programme of four. The minimum on which they would remain was six. There was absolute deadlock in the Cabinet during February on the question of six or four. A compromise was inevitable and was reached at a crucial Cabinet meeting on February 24th. Someone — Asquith, it would seem — hit upon this ingenious solution: four dreadnoughts would be laid down in 1909, and four more on April 1st, 1910 (that is, not within the same financial year), if the necessity for them was proven, with the material for the latter four to be collected in advance. The crisis was over, although considerable wrangling followed between McKenna (egged on by the Sea Lords) and Asquith as to the exact form in which the compromise should be announced in the estimates.

All this time, from the turn of the year, the Conservative press had been demanding in the most strident tones that British naval supremacy in 1912 be put beyond any doubt with a programme of

[1] McKenna to Grey, December 30th, 1908; McKenna: *Reginald McKenna*, p. 72.

six big ships. The revelations in the parliamentary debates during March touched off the most heated phase of the scare in the latter half of March and early April. Conservative politicians and press now demanded a programme of eight: the conditional clause of the estimates must be made compulsory. 'We want eight, and we won't wait' was the slogan of the hour. Battle was joined between the 'panicmongers', or patriots, as they preferred to be called, and the 'pacifists' or 'Little Englanders'. Around the four contingent ships the two sides fought 'like Greeks and Trojans over the body of Patroclus'. The agitation simmered until McKenna's announcement on July 26th that the Government would make the four contingent dreadnoughts part of the year's programme — 'without prejudice' to the 1910-1911 programme, as Asquith made clear. Although the keels would not be laid down until April 1910, the ships would be completed by March 1912. Apparently the decisive factor in the conversion of the Cabinet die-hards was the intelligence that Germany's allies, Italy and Austria, were each launching a programme of four dreadnoughts.

Looking back, it is a fact that the Admiralty anticipations were not fulfilled in 1912. That there had been no acceleration was apparent to the Government by the end of 1909. As matters turned out, even the official German schedule was not kept. Whatever German intentions may have been in 1908-1909, when the 'really critical date' of April 1912 arrived, which had figured so largely in the debates of 1909, instead of the seventeen German dreadnoughts which were stated to be a 'practical certainty', nine only were completed and ready. We may also note that only fifteen British capital ships were in commission at that date, since only three of the eight ships of the 1909-1910 programme were ready in the 'danger year', 1912. We must, however, enter an important *caveat*. As Churchill later noted, though he and Lloyd George 'were right in the narrow sense, we were absolutely wrong in relation to the deep tides of destiny'.[1] He no doubt had in mind the probability of a German war and the necessity of a substantial naval margin to allow for the vicissitudes of war. Had the four contingent ships not been approved in 1909, in January 1915 the Grand Fleet would have had only fifteen dreadnoughts available (one had been sunk and two others were seriously damaged at that date) to fight Germany's sixteen. In a word, it was the contingent four dreadnoughts of 1909 that gave the Navy its reasonable margin of security in the early and critical months of the war.

[1] Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 37-8.

Among the important by-products of the 1909 scare was the intensification of the anti-Fisher campaign. One example must suffice, this from the *Daily Express* (March 20th, 1909):

> The sole responsibility for the fact that in a few months [*sic*] Great Britain will be in a more vulnerable position than she has been since the battle of Trafalgar belongs to the First Sea Lord . . . Above all, he is responsible for the starving of the Navy during the last three years . . . If he had threatened resignation when an unsatisfactory naval programme was being prepared he would have forced the hands of the economaniacs. Moreover, his notorious 'Sleep safely in your beds' speech [at the Lord Mayor's banquet, November 1907] was a direct justification of Radical policy. We arraign Sir John Fisher at the bar of public opinion, and with the imminent possibility of national disaster before the country we say again to him, 'Thou art the man!'

Fisher was also scolded for having been caught 'napping' by the German acceleration and for not pressing for the whole eight. The facts are, as regards the latter charge: (1) Fisher and his colleagues stood firm in the crucial early months of 1909. A memorandum of the Sea Lords (March 4th), endorsed by the First Lord and forwarded to the Prime Minister, expressed their conviction that the situation was 'so serious' that 'the orders for the four ships for April 1st, 1910, must be made absolute in July next and the tenders must be invited at once'. Fisher relied on the weight of public opinion to see them through. He wrote Sir Arthur Davidson (March 20th): 'I welcome this scare — the Radicals swear I engineered it to "dish" them! The Public want pepper always to make them wake up!' (2) Fisher and McKenna, in the spring of 1909, worked to convert the contingent four into a reality, while proceeding on the assumption that they were as good as definitely promised. 'I can't make out the Prime Minister, as he keeps on quibbling about the *8* Dreadnoughts, *and yet he knows we are going on with them!* But he won't give Balfour a straight answer!' (Fisher to Davidson, March 20th, 1909). Undoubtedly Fisher would have resigned had the Cabinet vetoed the contingent four during the financial year. He made his position clear to Esher on March 21st: 'It won't do to resign on a *hypothesis* but on a *fact*! All is in train for the EIGHT! and, as Grey says, when the day is reached to sign the contracts and *then* a veto — *then* is the time to go in a great company, and not one

alone!' (3) As regards the 'napping' charge, Fisher brushed it off as 'an awful lot of lies . . . We knew within a week of the German acceleration in shipbuilding and of Krupp's extensions, also when they first began, and I have copy of memorandum given to Tweedmouth [December 3rd, 1907] for the Cabinet' (Fisher to Davidson, March 20th, 1909). The memorandum clearly showed that the Sea Lords were at that time very anxious about the possibility of accelerated German shipbuilding: 'We therefore consider it of the utmost importance that power be taken to lay down two more armoured ships in 1909-1910, making eight in all [for that year's programme].'[1] The Cabinet would not sanction this. With more and more alarming information on German acceleration pouring in at the end of 1908, the Sea Lords had decided to make a determined stand. In the event, as indicated above, Fisher exaggerated the extent and purposes of German building policy in 1908-1909.

But it was the inquiry into Admiralty policy that finally did Fisher in, and this brings us back to Beresford. On March 24th, 1909, he hauled down his flag. His career of active service afloat was thus apparently brought to a close, though he had two years to go before reaching the age of compulsory retirement. The *Standard* (March 24th) expressed the Beresfordian viewpoint perfectly: 'Because he has fearlessly told the truth, he has been dismissed by Mr. McKenna. There is the whole situation in a sentence.' The *Review of Reviews* (March) voiced the sentiments of the Fisherites: 'When two men ride on horseback, says the old proverb, one must ride behind. Lord Charles never could realize that he might be that one. Hence arose a state of friction which was at once a scandal and a danger to the Service.'

Encouraged and stimulated by the unparalleled enthusiasm and emotion displayed by the crowds at Portsmouth and London, after he had come ashore, Beresford promptly launched an all-out attack on Fisher. Thanks to a substantial bequest from a recently deceased brother, he was able to keep open house in Grosvenor Street, and, as Fisher remarked: 'Beresford says he can do more with his chef than by talking.' On April 2nd he addressed a letter to the Prime Minister which was in effect a savage attack on Fisher's administration. He made these principal charges: (1) The organization and distribution of the Fleet in home waters was defective — they were not even then 'organized in readiness for war'. (2) The Admiralty

[1] Cited in Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon: *The Life of John Rushworth, Earl Jellicoe* (London, 1936), pp. 157-8.

had no adequate machinery for the scientific preparation of war plans. Asquith decided to appoint a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to investigate the charges, with himself as chairman, and four Cabinet ministers, Crewe, Morley, Grey, and Haldane, as the other members. The Prime Minister announced the plan in Parliament on April 22nd, but it had been in the air for more than a week. Fisher was maddened.

> Imagine what a state of affairs when a meeting of Naval Officers on the active list in a room in Grosvenor Street is able to coerce the Cabinet and force the strongest Board of Admiralty to totter to its fall! Why, the 'Young Turks' are not in it! The Country must indeed be in a bad way if so governed! (Fisher to Esher, April 13th, 1909).

He worked furiously, through his 'guardian angel', Esher, to influence in advance the members of the committee, particularly Morley and Grey. Momentarily, he was so exasperated by the turn of events as to threaten resignation. He was persuaded by the King (April 20th) to retain office 'in spite of all'. Thereafter his fighting spirit was never higher.

> *I am not going till I am kicked out!* . . . I am going to stick to it, and stick to it in silence. 'Only Luke is with me' is what St. Paul said when all his friends had scuttled! I'm getting near that! However, I think of that fine epitaph of one of Nelson's Captains, '*Death found him fighting*' (Fisher to Hurd, May 4th, 1909).

One of the 'humiliations' which he had to endure was that, for the first time in history, a Board of Admiralty was to be put on trial to defend itself against the charges of an undisciplined subordinate. Another humiliation was the public revelation of the Bacon letters through Sir George Armstrong's speech at the Constitutional Club on April 2nd, supplemented by later disclosures. Parts of two letters (including No. 36, above) were made public. These revelations created a sensation and brought into the open the charge by Beresford and his friends that a system of espionage had been worked from the Admiralty. Many sharp questions were asked in Parliament and the press was full of the subject.

Fisher's case was not particularly convincing. He asked Esher (April 13th) to tell Balfour 'your unanswerable dictum that in the carrying out of a huge campaign there was no alternative but to

print every single thing as it came along, otherwise references impossible with such a mass of correspondence as there was'. McKenna did somewhat better in Parliament (May 27th):

> Is the House seriously going to be asked to condemn a great man because, at a time of great labour, he has ordered to be printed a number of letters . . . it would have been better, I would say, not to have been printed at all? . . . this sort of attack is doing a cruel injustice to the First Sea Lord, who has had the unreserved confidence of four successive First Lords of the Admiralty . . . and I appeal to the House not to be misled by any such trumpery matters as these into censuring in the slightest degree a man who has given the very best service to the public that any man could give. . . .

The Beresfordian camp was, naturally, not going to let the First Sea Lord off the hook. The Bacon disclosures only intensified the virulence of the anti-Fisher campaign, which more and more featured scurrilous and scandalous personal attacks on the First Sea Lord. Stalwart Fisher supporters like the *Westminster Gazette* and *Observer* adopted the McKenna line: mistakes may have been made, but looking at the whole record, and comparing debit and credit, there could be no doubt that 'a splendid balance will stand to the credit of Sir John Fisher's account in the national ledger' (*Observer*, May 30th).

Fifteen meetings of the Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. were held between April 27th and July 13th. They were devoted to the hearing and taking of oral and documentary evidence offered by McKenna, representing the Admiralty, and Beresford, who was accompanied by his 'naval brains', Custance. Fisher was kept in the background on purpose, and spoke only in reply to questions addressed to him by the Committee. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, a member of the C.I.D., testified at the thirteenth meeting and was cross-examined. The Committee's report was issued as a parliamentary paper on August 12th. The evidence that led up to the conclusions was not given, by reason, it was stated, of the confidential character of most of the data supplied. The Committee's 'general conclusion' ran as follows:

> In the opinion of the Committee, the investigation has shown that during the time in question no danger to the country resulted from the Admiralty's arrangements for war, whether

considered from the standpoint of the organization and distribution of the fleets, the number of ships, or the preparation of War Plans.

They feel bound to add that arrangements quite defensible in themselves, though not ideally perfect, were in practice seriously hampered through the absence of cordial relations between the Board of Admiralty and the Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet. The Board of Admiralty do not appear to have taken Lord Charles Beresford sufficiently into their confidence as to the reasons for dispositions to which he took exception; and Lord Charles Beresford, on the other hand, appears to have failed to appreciate and carry out the spirit of the instructions of the Board, and to recognize their paramount authority.

The Committee have been impressed with the differences of opinion amongst officers of high rank and professional attainments regarding important principles of naval strategy and tactics, and they look forward with much confidence to the further development of a Naval War Staff, from which the Naval members of the Board and Flag Officers and their staffs at sea may be expected to derive common benefit.[1]

It is perfectly clear that the Committee had not sustained the general indictment. However, Beresford derived 'in the main a great satisfaction' with the report, as he said in a circular letter to the press of August 16th. He claimed that his agitation and charges had been justified by the event. His supporters followed this line. The report, in the opinion of the Beresfordians, showed that several essential reforms consistently advocated by Beresford and strenuously resisted in Whitehall were now being officially adopted. Among them were stated to be these: a large homogeneous fleet in home waters had been formed; this fleet was under a single supreme control; the nucleus-crew ships were now regarded as a reserve; a naval war staff was in process of formation. Only the last-named may have been in some degree due to Beresford's complaints. But as the *Manchester Guardian* cleverly pointed out (August 17th): 'Only Beresford himself can explain how a scheme which in April was a danger to the country can now be cited as the fruits of his judgment and sagacity.'

[1] 'Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to inquire into certain questions of Naval Policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford', Command Paper 256 (1909).

Fisher's supporters hailed the report as a decisive vindication of the Admiralty, but the Admiral was 'bitterly disappointed'.

> It was a dirty trick to say that the Admiralty had not given its confidence to Beresford, when Beresford abused that confidence within 24 hours of hoisting his flag! And again a very dirty trick to bring in the red herring about the *Naval War Staff*, when all five members *knew* about the great work done in establishing the Naval War College at Portsmouth, and the *practical proof* of the great advance in strategical thought in the Navy by the concentration of our Fleets instead of their previous dispersion, and the getting rid of 160 vessels that could neither fight nor run away! . . . *It's a d—d cowardly business!* I am very sick about it all, considering what each member of the Committee had previously said to me (Fisher to Crease, August 22nd, 1909).

Underlying his bitterness and resentment was this thought: 'Had they *smashed* him, as they could have by the evidence, as a blatant liar, he would have been so utterly discredited that no newspaper would have noticed him ever again!' (Fisher to White, September 23rd, 1909). He never ceased believing that the Committee members had been afraid, and even terrified, of Beresford and his minions.

The inquiry report foreshadowed the 'further development of a Naval War Staff'. To appease its critics, the Admiralty had, before the Beresford hearings, projected, and now, on October 11th, announced, the establishment of a Navy War Council at the Admiralty for the consideration of strategic problems and war plans. Its regular members were the First Sea Lord as President, the Assistant Secretary of the Admiralty, the Director of Naval Intelligence, and the Director of the newly formed Naval Mobilization Department, which had taken over war plans and mobilization from N.I.D. This modest reform was not a true naval staff. The trouble was that the new department's function was merely advisory and that it met only on the initiative of the First Sea Lord. The Navy War Council therefore did not hush the agitation of those who were urging a genuine naval staff, corresponding in function to the General Staff of the Army. It would be the Navy's thinking department, whose purpose would be to work out in peacetime the main problems of war and to assist in the formulation of scientific war plans.

It is a hard fact that Fisher's idea of war direction was absolutely

incompatible with the idea of a General Staff and the idea of a working agreement with the War Office on the major problems of imperial defence. Fisher (and Sir Arthur Wilson) believed that war plans must be prepared in the greatest secrecy by the First Sea Lord alone, kept to himself, and divulged to the Army only on the outbreak of a war. 'Only Sir Arthur Wilson and myself, when I was First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, knew the Naval plan of war.'[1] Not even the Committee of Imperial Defence knew the war plan for the Navy. To be sure, an elaborate plan of war (188 pages) was prepared by a special committee in 1907. Its principal feature was an overwhelming naval offensive carried to the German coast. There is some question about how much of this document represented Fisher's ideas, which were the only ones that mattered. Indeed, it is stated on these plans that they were 'not in any way to be considered as those definitely adopted, but are valuable and instructive because illustrative of the variety of considerations governing the formation of War Plans'.

Fisher's exact naval plan was very secret, in order to ensure the 'suddenness and unexpectedness' on which the success of the plan depended. It is doubtful that the plan had been worked out in detail. But his general strategical thinking ran along these lines: Recognizing that the submarine had given the traditional policy of close blockade its *coup-de-grâce*, he scrapped that strategy, which had been in official favour since Nelson's day. But he planned to use sea power for something more than maintaining a distant blockade. He believed in joint naval and military operations, as in keeping with British tradition and admirably suited for a strong naval power possessing a small army. That is, his plan was to create a major diversion by suddenly throwing all or part of the British Expeditionary Force ashore at some point on the German coast near the heart of the enemy's power and on the flank and rear of the main body of the enemy. He also favoured the seizure of Heligoland by amphibious assault.

The establishment and great development of the Naval War College at Portsmouth, with a section of it devoted to the study and elaboration of war plans, had done something to regenerate strategic thought in the Navy; but it had not led to the establishment of a true naval staff, as Corbett and others had hoped.

Immersed in the technicalities of his profession — the great reforms, his redistribution of the fleet, the creation of new ships

[1] *Memories*, p. 102.

and weapons — he literally had no time to devote himself to a profound study as to how the Navy could best be used as an instrument of war. No war plan that existed in his brain had ever been considered in all its aspects or worked out. It was repugnant to him to delegate powers to others, and that comparatively junior officers, in a considered staff opinion, should voice their opinions as to the conduct of war. He preferred to do his own thinking. Therefore, no War Staff worthy of the name existed.[1]

Indeed, to his last days Fisher took a pretty dim view of a naval staff. 'A Naval War Staff at the Admiralty is a very excellent organization for cutting out and arranging foreign newspaper clippings . . .' 'So far as the Navy is concerned, the tendency of these "Thinking Establishments" on shore is to convert splendid Sea Officers into very indifferent Clerks.'[2] He contended that the case of the Army was entirely different.

The vulgar error of Lord Haldane and others . . . is that they do not realize that the Army is so absolutely different from the Navy . . . The Navy is ready for an instant absolute blow; it has nothing to do with strategic railways, lines of communication, or bridging rivers, or crossing mountains, or the time of the year, when the Balkans may be snowed under, and mountain passes may be impassable. No! the ocean is limitless and unobstructed; and the fleet, each ship manned, gunned, provisioned and fuelled, ready to fight within five minutes.[3]

And yet, strangely, he had pressed for a naval staff before he became First Sea Lord. A paper for the First Lord, 'On the Increasing Necessity for a General Staff for the Navy to meet War Requirements' (February 25th, 1902), foreshadowed a genuine naval staff headed by a chief of staff. It is a pity that, once in power, Fisher should forget that the Navy could not live on one man's brains and that he showed a total misunderstanding of the functions of a naval staff. Churchill partly remedied the deficiency in 1912, but the absence of a body of trained students of war at the Admiralty was very prejudicial to the naval operations in the early part of the war.

In mid-October there was a revival of the rumour that Fisher was about to relinquish his post and receive a peerage. This time

[1] Captain Taprell Dorling: *Men o' War* (London, 1929), p. 256.
[2] *Memories*, pp. 108, 110. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

the rumour-mongers were correct. The Admiral had been profoundly hurt by the Cabinet's failure to back him 100 per cent against the attacks of the Beresford clique. Also, he wanted to ensure the succession of Wilson while the latter was still of age. The decisive consideration was that his position had been weakened by the inquiry. On September 7th we find him writing Arnold White: 'There is a powerful cabal against me inside the Cabinet and their possibilities of mischief are very great.' Though obstinate at first, some time soon after October 20th he came to the conclusion that he had better leave while he could do so with dignity. Fisher's resignation, effective on January 25th, 1910 (his sixty-ninth birthday), and Wilson's succession, were officially announced on December 2nd. He was not especially happy about his impending retirement. 'Of course it's rather sad leaving when one feels still at one's best and critical times still ahead.' But he had the satisfaction of choosing his successor, who could be counted upon to continue his policies. 'I wasn't sweet on it at first, as Wilson is such a stonewall. However, you made a good point, which converted me, in saying that for two years a stonewall was desirable' (Fisher to McKenna, November 8th, 1909).

On the occasion of the King's birthday (November 9th) Fisher was elevated to the peerage as Baron Fisher. He was the first naval officer to be so honoured since Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour was created Baron Alcester in 1882. Although he was happy to accept a peerage, and was hurt that it had not been a viscountcy, he never held an exaggerated opinion of its worth. Later he was to write: 'Why should Great Britain lag behind Canada and the United States? Hereditary titles are ludicrously out of date in any modern democracy, and the sooner we sweep away all the gimcracks and geegaws of snobbery the better.'[1] 'My politics are a difficulty!' he wrote Sir Arthur Godley (November 10th, 1909), 'as I have voted consistently for both sides, whichever did most for the Navy . . . so where am I to sit?' In the end he appears to have sat with no party, but on the cross-benches, which is the usual and appropriate place for members of the forces on whom peerages are conferred.

It was just as well that Fisher left Whitehall when he did. The spirit of unity, which had long been one of the most marked characteristics of the service, had been shattered. This was not entirely his fault. Moreover, it can be argued that radical reforms were possible only by strong methods. Nevertheless, because of his methods, he

[1] *Records*, p. 73.

must bear a portion of the blame for weakening the old band-of-brothers feeling, which had been Nelson's principal legacy to the Navy. The Navy needed a period of rest, a surcease from recrimination and bickering. Moreover, new problems were coming to the fore, problems which could best be solved by a Naval General Staff, and here Fisher was a major obstacle. For this reason, too, it was well that he retired in 1910. Again, relations between the two services were distinctly bad. Fisher was far from blameless. Thus, the General Staff's schemes for using the whole B.E.F. as an extension of France's left wing made his hair stand on end. To dispatch English troops to the front in a continental war would be an act of suicidal idiocy, and he fought it hard. Also the Admiral still had his running feud with the Army over the invasion and conscription issues. '*Nothing will avail but an overwhelming Navy!* Conscription won't save us from starvation! But we are to have Conscription not to save our own skin but somebody else's skin! — France. Was there ever such folly?' (Fisher to Ponsonby, December 21st, 1909). Then, too, Fisher despised the War Office and all its ways, including alleged conceit, waste of money, and ignorance of war. Also, latterly he had developed an extreme dislike for the War Minister, Haldane ('a soapy Jesuit'), for his role in the row over the 1909 estimates, and his advocacy of a naval staff and, more recently, a 'Ministry of Defence'. Above all, he could not forgive Haldane for his alleged pro-Beresford role in the inquiry committee. For these reasons Army-Navy co-operation and the working out of joint war plans were rendered all but impossible so long as Fisher remained at the Admiralty.

By 1910 Fisher's work had been done. A tornado of energy, enthusiasm, and persuasive power, a man of originality, vision, and courage, a sworn foe of all outworn traditions and customs, the greatest of British naval administrators since St. Vincent, 'Jacky' Fisher was what the lethargic Navy had been in dire need of. His five years' tenure of the post of First Sea Lord was the most memorable and the most profitable in the modern history of the Royal Navy. He fell on the old régime with a devastating fury. During these strenuous years there was no rest for anyone connected with the service. 'It was as though a thousand brooms were at work clearing away the cobwebs.' In the teeth of ultra-conservative [illegible] was about [illegible] he revolutionized the Navy, cramming in a few years the [illegible] generations and laying foundations that can never be [illegible] gave his countrymen a new Navy, stronger and better

[1] Capt.

[2]

organized than he had found it, impregnated with the spirit of progress and efficiency, and purged as by fire of 'those obese and unchallenged old things that stifled and overlay' it in the past. It is easy to criticize his methods, though it can be argued that an exceptional situation could be dealt with only by an exceptional man of strong, commanding, and uncompromising personality. No doubt he made mistakes, as in his opposition to the creation of a Naval War Staff and in his perhaps too ruthless scrapping policy. But, as Napoleon once said, the man who never made a mistake never achieved anything, and Fisher achieved much: the foundations of that victory at sea which determined the issue of the first World War were laid by him. Count Reventlow, the chief spokesman of the German Navy League, referred to him at the time as 'one of the most remarkable reformers that the British Fleet has ever possessed; the man who attained his object, which was to bring the fighting squadrons to the highest possible efficiency in material, training, and strategic utility'. Winston Churchill, no uncritical admirer of Fisher, has contributed this estimate:

> There is no doubt whatever that Fisher was right in nine-tenths of what he fought for. His greatest reforms sustained the power of the Royal Navy at the most critical period in its history. He gave the Navy the kind of shock which the British Army received at the time of the South African War. After a long period of serene and unchallenged complacency, the mutter of distant thunder could be heard. It was Fisher who hoisted the storm-signal and beat all hands to quarters. He forced every department of the Naval Service to review its position and question its own existence. He shook them and beat them and cajoled them out of slumber into intense activity. But the Navy was not a pleasant place while this was going on. The 'Band of Brothers' tradition which Nelson handed down was for the time, but only for the time, discarded. . . .[1]

154: TO KING EDWARD

January 3rd, 1909

Sir John Fisher's humble duty and grateful thanks for Your Majesty's gracious remembrance in sending New Year Good Wishes, and may Your Majesty prosper for *many*, *many* years to come as Your Majesty has prospered so successfully thus far!

[1] Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 74-5.

The outlook is very ominous. Herculean efforts, of which we know secretly and *certainly*, are being made by Germany to push on their Dreadnoughts — so much so that McKenna, who was when he came here an extreme 'Little Navy' man, is now an ultra 'Big Navy' man, and Your Majesty would be astonished by his memorandum to Grey and to the Prime Minister as to building more Dreadnoughts next year than intended, and we shall certainly get them!

It is to be hoped we shall stand by Turkey, and if only Your Majesty could go to Constantinople next Easter, it would work wonders for Turkey, and all Your Majesty's Mohammedan subjects (more in number than the Sultan rules over, reckoning in Egypt) would have evoked in them all a mighty enthusiasm which would go far to settle the unrest in India. . . .

With my humble duty to Your Majesty,
I am Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

155: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 17th, 1909

Secret

My beloved E.,

One thing I forgot to say! I rather want to keep clear of Defence Committee till Morocco is settled, as I don't want to disclose my plan of campaign to *anyone*, not even C. B. himself. I haven't even told Ottley and don't mean to. The only man who knows is Wilson, and he's as close as wax! The whole success will depend upon *suddenness and unexpectedness*, and the moment I tell anyone there's an end of both!!! So just please keep me clear of any conferences, and I personally would sooner Defence Committee kept *still*. I'm seeing about the transports. I started it about 7 weeks ago and got 3 of my best satellites on it (*unknown to Ottley*), so you'll think me a villain of the deepest dye! Ottley is *very*, *very* clever, and I LOVE him, but he has the *cacoëthes loquendi* as well as *scribendi*!

Yours till death,

J. F.

Burn this.

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

156: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

February 10th, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

You possess such abnormal talent for marshalling facts and figures that I am feeling very diffident about presenting the following considerations to your notice:—

It seems to me upon reflection that Winston Churchill is doing the red-herring trick and leading off the controversy into comparatively minor issues, as to the relative value of non-Dreadnought types on both sides, whereas the main issue — THE ONLY ISSUE — is the number of Dreadnoughts! *Why?* Because, as you yourself pointed out last night, no matter how many of the 'Canopus' class, for instance, try to fight a Dreadnought, the Dreadnought, at a range beyond the 'Canopus,' gobbles them all up! It's the armadillo and the ants — the armadillo puts out its tongue and licks up the ants — the bigger the ant, the more placid the digestive smile! And so the Dreadnought would eat up the 'King Edward[s]' also. Foreign nations have put the Dreadnought type beyond controversy, because at enormously greater proportionate expense than England, through involving them in huge indirect expenses (widening Kiel Canal, dredging, etc.), they have one and all, dead against their own shallow-water interests (Germany, America, Brazil, Argentine, etc.), all plunged for the Dreadnought type pure and simple. The *Indomitable* the other day at Aranci in her first 15 rounds hit the target 13 times at a range of over 4 miles, the target 1/14th her own size. How futile to discuss 'Kaisers' or 'Canopuses'! Nor is it possible for your colleagues in the Cabinet to realize the enormous devastating superiority of only even 1 inch in calibre in the shell power, which tells so in the '*one-calibre-all-big-gun-ship*', so I suggest to you that the controversy wants to be brought back to the number of Dreadnoughts, *and that we are fighting for our lives, and for a one-power standard now*, when the pre-Dreadnoughts shortly go the way of all flesh and die out! And to ask the simple question that, though we build *six* Dreadnoughts, can we sleep quiet in our beds in view of the certainty that the Germans CAN have 21 against our 18 in April 1912, *when they mean to fight*?

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

157: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 17th, 1909

My beloved Friend,

I have got to be examined by the Prime Minister and a Committee of the Cabinet to-day, so can't come to see you with these papers for the King as promised. I hope to make Lloyd George 'sit up'!

Grey spent 1½ hours with me alone yesterday at my house, and no doubt about his being all right. Please keep this secret about Grey and my going before the Cabinet Committee.

The Prime Minister is as weak as water! When McKenna last August would only go in for 4 Dreadnoughts, Asquith pressed him that 6 were essential, and now when McKenna has been to Damascus and become Paul instead of Saul of Tarsus, Asquith deserts him.[1]

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

158: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

February 21st, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

In thinking over the matter since our conversation last night, I have a most unpleasant sense of compromise, *when I know there ought to be no compromise*, and even if there be no compromise in reality, yet the form of words used might justify the Cabinet doing in November next what they would not do if no such qualifying statement was made, and the six ships would be beyond suspicion. They are not beyond suspicion if this qualifying statement by the Prime Minister accompanies the Estimates. So with very great reluctance indeed *I don't feel as if I personally could acquiesce* IN ANY RESERVATION WHATEVER accompanying the *six* which we know in our hearts is too few, and jeopardizing our national existence, *and that we ought to build* EIGHT! The statement the Prime Minister *ought* to make is not that we may only build *four*, but that we shall build *eight* if found practicable! The compromise should be that neither four or eight are named, *and six in the Estimates without any doubts what-*

[1] To Knollys the following day: '*A very hot time* yesterday and crisis still continues . . . We are going to win all right, as I don't think *they* will face the consequences of the Board of Admiralty resigning. There is black treachery besides unspeakable weakness!'

ever as an irreducible minimum — no qualifying statements. I am very sorry indeed for your unexampled difficulties, and it is splendid how you have so unswervingly stood out for the vital six! You may say, 'We have the substance, why bother about the shadow?' Because the shadow cast by the statement lends a possibility that would not otherwise exist, or why need there be any minimizing statement?

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

P.S. We want at once to make all the contracts possible for all the six ships, even to accumulating the material for the two Dockyard ships (not to be laid down till next February), and certainly to order all the guns, gun-mountings, *and turbine machinery for all the six ships at once*, but how could we do this if any statement by the Prime Minister that the Cabinet may cancel the last two ships next November? Besides this, the Cabinet could do in November what they could not do now when Parliament is sitting, so any statement is dangerous.

159: TO REAR-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

February 21st, 1909

Dear Jellicoe,

Late last night the First Lord urgently telephoned for me to see him to tell me of a visit from Grey with a compromise from Winston Churchill, who had been lunching with him. I won't trouble you with his 4 compromises,[1] they were all inadmissible and the First Lord rejected them, but the First Lord has suggested a seeming compromise which he says is no compromise but it 'saves their faces'! At first I felt inclined to concur, but now I don't and I've written the enclosed letter [No. 158]. The Prime Minister is to say that *though six are in the Estimates, only four are to be built if the Cabinet so decide next November.*

[1] 'I. Four now and two or more later if necessary; in the interval more evidence to be sought.

II. Declare programme of twenty at rate of four a year, to be laid down at earliest moment desired each year, with all the accelerations which that gives.

III. Great feature of expansion gun and turret plant to give rapid expansion necessary, with grant from Exchequer if required.

IV. Great contributory economy from rest of naval estimates, so much to be allowed for new construction and so much to be added if Admiralty make it up from other votes' (Churchill memorandum in McKenna Papers, attached to Fisher's letter to Jellicoe).

The Cabinet could do in November, when Parliament is not sitting, what they dare not do now, *or rather could not do now*, because if we stick to it, *we must* have the six ships. I told the First Lord last night that the Sea Lords intended to hang together on this job and intended to have six without any reservations whatever, and if not, *then we will resign*, and that if he spoke to you to-day about it, you would confirm this, and could also speak for May and Winsloe, *so you must rub that in*. I'm not doubting the First Lord, but he is inclined to compromise through Grey's solicitations not to break up the Party, although Grey is really absolutely with us. I feel sure we ought to be no party to any reservations whatever being made. We want to order the whole six now and all their paraphernalia. We might make the contract for the material of the two Dockyard ships to be laid down in February, besides all the guns, gun-mountings, etc. for the whole six. How could we do that if any statement by the Prime Minister that the last two ships might be cancelled in November? It's absurd! We must have a plain straightforward dead certainty that the six ships are going to be laid down, with no suspicions whatever.

One can understand the enormous pressure brought to bear on the First Lord, and he should have all our utmost help, *but we can't have any doubt about the six*, and any such statement of ANY KIND by the Prime Minister does entail doubt.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

160: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 22nd, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I must thank you for your letter just received, which demolishes my fears, because I had overlooked the fact that the House of Commons must be called together before our last ships are due to be laid down. Nevertheless, I don't regret my letter to you (though I've given you much trouble), because I have elicited from you such a convincing exposition of the Admiralty responsibility, and would be a splendid leading article for Spender! We must hope that to-morrow will settle matters.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

161: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

February 27th, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

This will make you shake in your shoes![1] 'Nelson's last words' and 'Music and singing' give the graphic touch! Beresford has to-day sent in a programme to take his ships for a cruise to Lough Swilly from March 10 to March 20. In the ordinary course it would be rather stupid to approve this in view of the re-arrangement of the ships on March 24, but I imagine it will be wisest to let him have his fireworks. It will be a contrast to Sir Arthur Wilson's departure, who made a signal forbidding cheering or any demonstration on his departure. Somebody is sure to note the contrast.

Yours very truly, J. A. Fisher

162: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Private February 28th, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

After writing to you last night I went to the Athenaeum to read the *Nation*. Presently Winston Churchill came in. I nodded and went on reading. When I went out he followed me out. I told him I could not discuss the naval situation with him. He was extremely cordial and expressed his anxiety as to my future. I told him as a great secret that my future was 20 Dreadnoughts before April 1912! This rather upset him, and we parted. This morning I have a huge letter from him. It's marked 'Personal, secret and private,' so I can't send it to you, but I send my reply. He indicates an inquiry into the Admiralty administration, etc. He knows that would imply want of confidence and would enforce resignation. I trace White and Custance there![2] My idea is we shall come out on top! *It is not his!*

Yours truly, J. A. Fisher

[1] An enclosed printed card announced that the Imperial Maritime League was sponsoring 'A Public Demonstration against the Passing Of Our Naval Supremacy and the Dismissal of Lord Charles Beresford from the command of the Channel Fleet', at the Hampstead Conservatoire, March 3rd. 'COME AND HELP TO SAVE YOUR COUNTRY!' 'Music and singing' featured the programme as well as four speakers, including Maxse, of the *National Review*. At the head of the card was the quotation ' "God and My Country" (Nelson's last words)'.

[2] Admiral Custance's career had ended with the expiration of his appointment in the Channel Fleet in June 1908. He now devoted himself to writing books and pamphlets in which he pressed for fleets of many battleships of moderate tonnage, powerful armament, and slow speed, in preference to the Admiralty policy of a relatively few very large, fast ships, in which armament was sacrificed to some extent to speed and armour protection.

163: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

February 28th, 1909

Private, Personal, and Secret
My dear Winston,

I appreciate your kind motive in writing me your long letter of to-day's date. I confess I never expected you to turn against the Navy after all you had said in public and in private. ('*Et tu, Brute!*') I am sure you won't expect me to enter into any discussion with you, as there can be only one exponent of the Admiralty case — the First Lord. As to want of foresight on the part of the Admiralty, the Sea Lords expressed their grave anxiety in a memorandum presented to the then First Lord in December 1907. The Cabinet ignored that anxiety and cut down the Estimates. You want to do the same again! We can take no risks this year — last year we did. We felt then there would be time to pull up — the margin is now exhausted.

I reciprocate your grief at our separation! I retain the memory of many pleasant duets!

Ever yours, J. A. Fisher

164: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 4th, 1909

Private and Secret
My dear Winston,

Thanks for your letter just come, and more especially for its concluding French words of your unaltered feelings towards me. It's kind of you to send me these Cabinet revelations. It's too sad and most deplorable. Let us write the word 'Finis'! The Apostle is right! The tongue is the very devil! (N. B. Yours is slung amidships and wags at both ends!)

Yours till the Angels smile on us! (Four more Dreadnoughts!!!)
J. F.

I told Marsh[1] I had burnt your previous letter. No eye but mine had seen it. I have also burnt this one just come from you for the same reason! '*Amantium irae amoris integratio est.*' Have you got the same cook as at Bolton Street?

I think it would be quite lovely to call the four extra Dreadnoughts:—

[1] Edward (afterwards Sir Edward) Marsh, Churchill's private secretary, 1905-1915.

No. 1 'Winston'
No. 2 'Churchill'
No. 3 'Lloyd'
No. 4 'George'

How they would fight! Uncircumventable! Read this out to the Cabinet!

165: FROM SIR EDWARD GREY

Foreign Office
March 5th, 1909

Private
My dear Fisher,

Here is a copy of the record I have made of our conversation yesterday. It may be useful for you to keep it for reference in case further questions or difficulties arise at a later stage.

Yours sincerely,

E. Grey

[Enclosure][1]

Secret March 4th, 1909

Sir John Fisher came to see me this afternoon by desire of McKenna. He was in much anxiety as to the Cabinet decision about Navy Estimates. He detailed to me definite information as to German building of ships and stated that *in his opinion orders should be given by us at once for 8 battleships* though no payments were to be made for the last 4 of these ships before the first of April 1910. He said that the omission of the words 'incur liability' and the constant discussion and altercation ('*quibbling*' was his word) in the footnote to the Estimates had left him without any certainty as to the intentions of the Cabinet. To add to his anxiety, Winston Churchill had told him definitely that the Cabinet would allow 4 ships for this year; 4 and no more for next year.

I told him that I had been growing more and more uncomfortable about the progress of German shipbuilding and what he told me now

[1] The memorandum that follows was given by Grey to the Prime Minister, who concurred in it. The italics represent Fisher's underscoring in his copy.

only confirmed the personal opinion at which I had arrived already, that we could not tell to within six months when any German ship would be ready from the time when it was laid down. *I considered therefore that we ought to build as fast as we could till we had the situation well in hand.* But McKenna had told us all clearly that we should gain nothing in time by letting contracts for more than 4 ships at present. He had even said that nothing could be gained by putting more than *6 ships in hand* in the financial year 1909-10. ['I never agreed to this.' —J.F.] For the moment therefore the first thing to be done was to ask Parliament to vote the money for 4 ships and to put them in hand at once. The Cabinet agreed to this.

The next point was to give notice to Parliament that as soon as we considered it *necessary, orders would be given or contracts let in advance for four more ships* though no payments would be made till the financial year 1910-11. As no time would be saved by giving these orders now, all that was required was to give notice to Parliament that we intended to give the orders when necessary to enable contractors to put the ships in hand.

As soon as the moment arrived when in the opinion of McKenna and the Board of Admiralty time would be lost and national safety endangered by not giving the orders for these 4 additional ships or some of them, the matter should be brought before the Cabinet. If the Cabinet refused then to give McKenna authority to act, then would be the time for McKenna and the Admiralty and any of us to decide whether the action of the Cabinet was inconsistent with national safety. For the moment the Cabinet were doing all they could; they were taking money to build four ships, as many as could be put in hand at once; they were by the footnote in the Estimates giving notice *of their intention to put four more in hand when in their opinion national safety required it. It was for the Admiralty to say when in their opinion that time had come.* The Cabinet must then give its decision; those who differed from that decision would then have an opportunity of saying so. ['We say "now".' —J.F.] At present there was no decision of the Cabinet from which anyone who took my view could differ. There was no decision that only four ships were to be ordered for the financial year 1910-11 — that would be considered when the time came to deal with the Estimates for that year.

Fisher said if the decision of the Cabinet was to be construed in this way it would meet his difficulty as regards the present moment.

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

166: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 5th, 1909
6 p.m.

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I have just heard from the Controller that you had told him at 5 p.m. that the Prime Minister had directed that the printing of the words '4 new ships' was to be in slanting type. Of course one can't resign on whether the type is upright or slanting — but as I told Sir E. Grey this afternoon, all these petty quibblings do so clearly indicate that if in any possible way the laying down of more than 4 ships can be evaded it will be done, and it seems that our only reliance must rest on such an emphatic declaration in your speech as will remove all doubt (*and I do not doubt you for an instant*) that the declaration in the footnote that these 4 ships will be completed by March 1912 is the determined resolve of the Board of Admiralty. As Sir E. Grey said to me, the straightforward course was to have put the 8 ships in the Estimates with a money token, and it has got to come to the same thing in the end. Sir E. Grey was so explicit in his conversation with me, and being the soul of honour that he is, I am perfectly content to leave it to you to so deal with these jugglers that we shan't be swindled.

What so disquiets me now is that 4 of the German Dreadnoughts are of 22,000 tons and that Cruiser 'H' will surpass the *Indomitable*. What an uproar there will justly be if we are over-classed. I ought to have pressed my convictions of a year ago to the bitter end for the more powerful 13½-inch gun armament. It is now too late, I fear, for the 4 ships to be laid down on April 1, 1910 [to be so armed].[1]

I sincerely hope you are going to vanish for a week. YOU HAVE INDEED FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] It was not too late. The first two of the big ships (two dreadnoughts) of the 1909-1910 programme of six dreadnoughts and two battle cruisers, which were laid down in July, received a primary armament of 12-inch guns; the construction of the other six ships was postponed in order that they might receive the new 13.5-inch gun.

167: TO SIR EDWARD GREY

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 7th, 1909

Secret

Dear Sir Edward,

I have to thank you for your letter and copy of the memorandum you gave the Prime Minister of our conversation at the Foreign Office. I agree in it all. I also wrote down for my own satisfaction the moment I left you my impressions, and I enclose my original paper as I wrote it; but I accept your Memorandum fully, so I don't put this forward either in substitution or opposition. My paper is tinged with the Admiralty and yours with the Cabinet aspect of the case. They both come to the same thing.

Two things I wish to mention to you. You correctly state what Winston Churchill said to me, but it was an absolutely private conversation and I must regret its being quoted in the Cabinet. Winston might have retaliated with effect by quoting strong words of mine — that it was absolutely imperative we should have 20 of the Dreadnought type by March 1912, and other fierce language of mine to him about National Safety, which, had he told the Cabinet, would assuredly have got all their backs up! I take this as friendly of him.

Secondly, I wish to appeal to you against Mr. Lloyd George's reiterated statements that I should be satisfied with 30 British against 25 German Dreadnoughts. He put that question to me at our meeting in the Prime Minister's room at the House of Commons, and my definite reply was that the Admiralty had taken their stand against paper programmes, and each year's Estimates must deal with each year's requirements based on foreign ships actually in their Estimates for the year, and I added the words 'Sufficient for the year are the Estimates thereof', or what is a better way of putting it, 'Sufficient for the year is the shipbuilding thereof'. What the relative proportion of Dreadnoughts should be gets us into the Two-Power Standard controversy, and, if you remember, the First Lord then and there told Lloyd George that his argument on this point should be with the First Lord of the Admiralty, as being 'Policy' and not 'Adequacy'! I don't want to have it fastened on to me, as desired by Lloyd George, that I have fixed a Dreadnought proportion with Germany.

There is one more point: I have never agreed, and cannot agree, that 6 Dreadnoughts was our limit in building. I am absolutely certain if the whole 8 were at once ordered, they could all be put in

hand and delivery ensured as desired, but the First Lord no doubt rightly desired to take the opinion which leaned to absolute safety of production.

Yours sincerely,

J. A. Fisher

[Enclosure]

WRITTEN DOWN ON LEAVING SIR E. GREY

3:40 p.m., 4.3.09.

Sir E. Grey said he would see the Prime Minister and tell him as follows as the result of our interview:—

I. That the notes in Estimates would authorize the contracts being made for the 4 additional ships at any time after the Parliamentary approval had been obtained. ['This means 8 Dreadnoughts to be ordered this year.' —J. F.]

II. That whenever the Admiralty considered it right to enter into these contracts the Cabinet should be apprised, so that the work could proceed with Cabinet sanction.

III. If *then* there was any difficulty raised, that would be the appropriate time for reconsideration, not alone for any of those at the Admiralty but others also. ['The original word was "resignation" and Sir E. Grey said to me he would go also with me.' —J. F.]

IV. Sir E. Grey's view was that the uncertainties of German shipbuilding were so great and the risks so considerable that we ought to have at least a 6 months' margin in hand ahead of them, and to obtain that margin we ought to build as fast as possible.

V. Sir E. Grey understood it would be made quite clear that no payments would be made until April 1910 on account of these 4 additional ships, no matter what time the contracts for them were made.

J. F.

Sir E. Grey added that these 4 additional ships to be laid down on April 1st, 1910, did not in any way imply that only 4 ships were to be ordered for the financial year 1910-11 — that would be considered when the time came to deal with the Estimates for that year.[1]

[1] Grey, on March 9th, returned this memorandum, 'which agrees with my own recollection and what I wrote'. Fisher sent a copy to McKenna on March 12th with the postscript blue-pencilled and this note attached: 'I think you might like to have enclosed copy by you. I think the postscript is as valuable as any part of it in view of possible statements that might be made.'

168: TO KING EDWARD

March 10th, 1909

. . . McKenna read me out his speech that he is going to make next Tuesday [March 16th] in Parliament, and it will remove the ambiguity of the Estimates. I think I am most disappointed in Mr. Haldane, who has been a terrible Judas. Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, bad as they were, fought out in the open. They said they would resign if more than 4 ships — McKenna asked for 6 and we have got 8! Lloyd George is a good attorney, but he is not a Machiavelli! . . . Your Majesty has one splendid servant in the Cabinet — the Foreign Secretary. He is as much above all the rest of them as Mr. Balfour is above all his colleagues! . . .

With my humble duty I am, Sir,
Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

169: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

March 15th, 1909

Private and Secret and Personal

My dearly beloved E.,

I have just finished in these early hours a careful restudy of your paper E.5 (which I love) and the criticisms thereon by French[1] and the General Staff. I dismiss French's criticism as being that of a pure, correct Cavalry expert, and not dealing with the big questions. The General Staff criticism is, on the other hand, the thin end of the insidious wedge of our taking part in continental war as apart absolutely from coastal military expeditions in pure concert with the Navy — expeditions involving hell to the enemy because backed by an invincible Navy (the citadel of the military force). I don't desire to mention these expeditions and never will, as our military organization is so damnably leaky! but it so happens for two solid hours this morning I have been studying one of them of inestimable value only involving 5,000 men and some guns, and horses about 500 — a mere fleabite! but a collection of these fleabites would make Wilhelm scratch himself with fury! However, the point of my letter is this: Ain't we d—d fools to go on wasting our very precious moments in these abstruse disquisitions on the Grebbe line or the passage of the

[1] General French was Inspector-General of the Forces, 1907-1911.

Dutch-German Frontier river and whether the bloody fight is to be at Rheims or Amiens, until the Cabinet have decided the great big question raised in your E. 5: *Are we or are we not going to send a British Army to fight on the Continent as quite distinct and apart from coastal raids and seizures of islands, etcetera, which the Navy dominate?* Had not the Prime Minister better get this fixed up before we have any more discussions such as foreshadowed to-morrow?

Yours till a cinder,

J. F.

170: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 19th, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

. . . I am disquieted by the Prime Minister's reply to Mr. Balfour.[1] The tone of it savours of 'going back', but it may be that he had no such intention. I hope not. As Job says, 'The trumpet must not give an uncertain sound'! (It may be observed in parenthesis that the patience of Job has been exceeded in the discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer!) There can be no doubt about the *8* Dreadnoughts to be completed by March 1912, and equally no doubt that whatever number of Dreadnoughts are to be in the Estimates for next year (1910-1911) can only be determined when the time comes to prepare the Estimates for that year. I know absolutely these two points are determined in your own mind, but this apparent tendency to wobbling in the Prime Minister is unpleasant, and I feel constrained to mention it to you at once. I gather from the Controller that he will proceed at once with all the necessary enquiries in regard to the 8 Dreadnoughts ready for the definite action to be taken in July in regard to the extra four. I am not the least uneasy about having the 8, neither have I the least disquietude as to your action, or that of Sir E. Grey when the time comes for definite action.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Fisher probably had in mind this statement by Asquith in the House of Commons, March 18th: 'I do not at this moment – it would not be right or within my duty – forecast whether or not the whole of these four ships will be laid down on 1st April, next . . . I do not think it would be right at the present time to assume that the contingency I laid down [March 16th: to lay down the four contingent ships on April 1st, 1910, the materials having been previously ordered, if the acceleration of the German programme went on] will naturally and inevitably arise. I should hope it does not. If it does . . . we have taken powers in the Estimates . . . to meet it. . . .'

171: TO ARNOLD WHITE

March 21st, 1909
5 a.m., Sunday
'The early bird'!

My dear Friend,

I woke with the thought of your kindly visit yesterday and so appreciate your sympathy. Sympathy is the greatest force in the world. The Bible says so! Those idiots of parsons mistranslate it and call it 'love'! and don't realize that when St. Paul called it 'charity', when he explained all its attributes, it meant *sympathy*. Sermon ended!

But I am writing a line to say I feel sure that silence is patriotic. Don't check this wave of public emotion that will give us the 8 Dreadnoughts a year! What a cold douche if I got up and said, 'Yes, the gradual, unswerving work of 4 years has now culminated in our having in Home Waters 2 Fleets, each of which in all its parts is incomparably superior to the whole German Fleet mobilized for war. Don't take my word! You will see them next June. Count them! Go and see them for yourself. They each and all hit the target. Not one good and one bad! They are *all* good! Look at the battle-practice report. See the *Indomitable* hitting a target 14 times smaller than herself 13 times out of 15! At what distance? 5 miles! Try and look at something 5 miles off! No scratch crews in these two Fleets — all previously associated together: 306 vessels went into the North Sea last year without a single breakdown or delay. *That* is the test of efficiency. "Sea-keeping and hitting!" "SO SLEEP QUIET IN YOUR BEDS!" '

It would be magnificent to say this, but it would not be 8 Dreadnoughts! Also I might say to them: 'Don't boil over about the Germans! Believe me, you don't understand their feverish haste in building Dreadnoughts. It is *not* to fight you! No, it's the octopus in the North Sea closing round it and the ever present and daily increasing dreadful fear of a "Copenhagen," which a Pitt or a Bismarck would not hesitate one second about! "*Cease building or I strike!*" '

Please, whatever you do, I entreat you to be silent as the grave over the papers I showed you, and don't say a word to help me. *The Times* said the other day that the British Fleet had reached a stage of unparalleled strength and fighting efficiency. If the Public don't believe in that testimony in one's favour, they won't believe [it] if

one rose from the dead! So don't bother yourself, please, on my behalf.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

172: TO KING EDWARD[1]

March 24th, 1909

Secret and Private

Sir John Fisher's humble duty and Your Majesty may like to have a brief account of what is going on in regard to the *8* Dreadnoughts.

I had a few private words with Balfour and Cawdor, and they expressed themselves as wanting some more definite promise from the Prime Minister than he is inclined to give. Last night I had a long talk with the Prime Minister and I entertain no doubt of our having the four additional Dreadnoughts, but this Vote of Censure has apparently stiffened him against any apparent giving in. He expressed himself to me as absolutely determined to have the ships ordered in July unless some German information renders it unnecessary. For myself I really cannot understand why he does not publicly state what he apparently is privately determined on. The quibbling makes one uneasy!

The Queen graciously asked me to lunch,[2] and after lunch I went downstairs to write a pressing letter I had forgotten, when in walked Metternich, the German Ambassador. We two alone glared at each other for a second and then I got up from writing and spoke to him. I said, 'We are having a hot time, Ambassador, about numbers of Dreadnoughts. Some say you will have 13 in April 1912, some say 17, Mr. Balfour says 21.' Metternich: 'There will be only *13*!' Self: 'Is that counting "Indomitables"?' Metternich: 'Yes — counting "Indomitables".' Self: 'How all this scare then would vanish, Ambassador, if you would let our Naval Attaché go and count them!' Metternich: 'That is impossible. Other Governments would also

[1] This letter was prompted by the King's letter of March 22nd, with a covering letter from Sir Arthur Davidson (see Lee: *Edward VII*, II, 680-1). The King was upset and angry over the revelations made during the naval debate in the House of Commons; over the fact that Fisher had not at the time told him of the December 3rd, 1907, memorandum to Tweedmouth; and over the uncertainty regarding the eight dreadnoughts. 'The King wants to find out *who* it is who is to blame for letting Germany get ahead of us', wrote Davidson. Fisher's reply was apparently not entirely satisfactory, which explains the letter to Davidson that follows.

[2] 'To keep my spirits up, as she knows of all my enemies' (Fisher to White, ca. March 24th, 1909).

want to — *besides, something would be seen which we wish to keep secret.*' Just then Knollys came into the room and I left. My inference is that they are building much bigger ships than they say they are. We are pushing on with all the arrangements for the *8* Dreadnoughts, so no time will be lost.

With humble duty to Your Majesty, I am Your Majesty's humble Servant,

J. A. Fisher

173: TO SIR ARTHUR DAVIDSON

March 27th, 1909

Secret and Private

Dear Davidson,

Mr. McKenna told me last night that Sir E. Grey in his speech on Monday [March 29th] on the Vote of Censure is going to make a full and clear statement of our position and resources in regard to German shipbuilding and disprove the various erroneous statements which have caused panic, so, knowing how clear and honest Sir E. Grey is, I had perhaps best let it alone for the King to read it all in his speech, but I would wish to ask His Majesty's recollection of my submitting on two occasions the abnormal and immense purchases of nickel by the German Government, and perhaps you may find one of my papers on the subject in your box, pointing out that this constituted absolute evidence of great preparations for large increased production of guns, gun-mountings, and armour, and hence of ships also.

Further, most reliable information arrived last night at the Admiralty which dissipates the alarm that the Germans were ahead of us. They are apparently aiming at one object only — a higher speed in their parallel ships. I understand the Government contention is that, had not Mr. Asquith and Mr. McKenna reserved their information, to be imparted with the dramatic suddenness it was in the House of Commons, they would not have had the complete success they obtained over the great majority of their own Party in agreeing to the *8* ships *we are certainly going to get.*

Myself I wait with curiosity how Sir E. Grey will be able on Monday to reconcile Metternich's statements with what we believe to be the facts. I understand that Metternich has again stated there will be only *13* German Dreadnoughts of all sorts *by the end of 1912*, and

we certainly shall have *20 by March 1912*! When I have read Sir E. Grey's speech on Monday, I will write to you again if he does not fully answer what His Majesty requires to be satisfied about. We certainly should not have got *8* Dreadnoughts apart from all that has happened. Indeed it is now being freely said that the Admiralty engineered the scare! The German Naval Attaché asked to see Sir John Jellicoe, the Controller, a few days ago and apologized to him for having given incorrect information, and said he had been deceived by the German Admiralty when he had stated that German Dreadnoughts had not been accelerated. He acknowledges they have been accelerated, and yet Metternich says only 13 at end of 1912, which means no acceleration. The fact is we must have a large margin against lying!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

174: TO VISCOUNT KNOLLYS[1]

March 30th, 1909

My dear Knollys,

The extract I enclose from Sir E. Grey's speech makes it clear the Admiralty have not been 'caught napping', and Sir E. Grey also convinced the House of Commons last night that the Admiralty had taken such steps with the great firms as to ensure our outstripping the Germans. Tirpitz has solemnly declared (see *Times* of to-day) that they cannot build Dreadnoughts under 3 years. We certainly are going to build ours in two years. It is also certain, however ambiguous the Prime Minister is, that we shall have *8* Dreadnoughts all right. I gave you copy of the memorandum presented by the Sea Lords (and signed by them) to Mr. McKenna on January 15, 1909, which you still have, and on the last page but one you will find these words:—

'A memorandum prepared for the information of the First Lord (Lord Tweedmouth) and signed by the four Sea Lords on December 3, *1907*, clearly shows that they were at that time very anxious about the possibility of accelerated German shipbuilding and that anxiety is now fully justified.' (That is to say, Tirpitz confesses they

[1] The King noted on this letter: 'This is quite satisfactory and I have kept the *Westminster Gazette* cartoon, which is *most* amusing.' The cartoon (March 22nd), titled 'A "Two-Power" Nightmare', shows a symbol of German armed might (Bismarck) ominously hovering over a sleeping 'Britannia', and, in a second panel, the reverse situation.

have accelerated two Dreadnoughts, but we knew it within a fortnight.)

I hope you have got that memorandum safely locked up, as the Prime Minister would not like it to be known.

I had half an hour's conversation with Sir E. Grey alone in his private room at House of Commons before he made his speech, and I have no doubt that we may safely trust him to keep the Navy right.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

175: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 30th, 1909

Private

My beloved E.,

. . . Grey rubbed in two great points yesterday:

I. Lack of information as to German acceleration will be acted on as if acceleration were a fact.

II. The *8* this year won't affect next year.

I watched Lloyd George and Winston with malignant glee as their two heads went together as he said those two things!

Yours for ever,

J. F.

Secret and private. McKenna in a most kindly spirit; wants me to see Northcliffe.[1] I doubt the wisdom of it! . . .

176: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

March 30th, 1909

First Lord.

I think this is the way to set the problem you originated yesterday:—

I. With what object are the Germans building Dreadnought Cruisers of so greater speed than ours?

[1] The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Northcliffe, founder and proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, 1894-1922, and chief proprietor of *The Times*, 1908-1922. He also controlled the *Observer*, 1905-1912.

II. What should we do?

The Germans are making great sacrifices because every increase in size of their ships involves expense *everywhere*! In docks, dredging, Kiel Canal, etc., etc. Deep water *nowhere* — and nature against them *everywhere*! And further, these huge ships *not* the vessels for home fighting — we must seek their mission elsewhere! Let us emphasize the fact that all their material interests are against big ships — ours in their favour — so some big plum that must be tempting them! What is the biggest plum of war in the world? Our commerce! Futile to think of anything less to raid that commerce than the biggest, fastest, most heavily armed and armoured ships that can be built, because if not so their pursuit and capture almost instant through our enormous preponderance in cruisers. 4 to 1 — 35 to 9![1] But how are they to get into the Atlantic? for there is their happy hunting ground. *Nowhere else!* It seems incredible their passing the British cordon at Scapa Flow (*the Straits of Dover barred!*), but the stratagems of war are infinite, and the seemingly impossible happens! Replenishing fuel and no base at once occur as deadly to these Atlantic Germans! Avoidance of concerted action against them with wireless as now perfected equally against them. Nevertheless, though their destruction certain, yet what they could effect is worth their suicide. That effect would be the almost absolute cessation of food coming to us IF only a few days' freedom of action on the Argentine and Atlantic trade routes!

II. What should we do? Of course lose not a moment in building ships bigger and faster. Here undoubtedly is a case of 2 keels to 1! At present we are 35 to 9 in this type! or near 4 to 1!

The war charts seem to convince one they won't get out, but that can't be trusted to! Tirpitz can plan these war charts out as exactly as we have done, and he certainly is saying to himself: 'No earthly provocation will make me fight till I get my "uncatchables"'! We have to work hard in the next two years and build 8 'Nonpareils' to meet cruisers 'E', 'F', 'G', and 'H'. Cruiser 'E', the *Blücher*, has 8 11-inch guns and a speed of 25 knots — you want 28 knots to catch her!

J. F.

[1] The figures are for armoured cruisers. None had been laid down by either power after the introduction of the battle cruiser.

177: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

March 31st, 1909

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I hope you won't get sick of my morning effusions, but I may not see you, and possibly you may wish to let the Prime Minister know of what follows:—

Esher came to see me last night. Balfour had told him yesterday of an interminable visit from Beresford, who found Balfour immovable as to joining in any attack on the Admiralty. Beresford is to address some City gathering shortly. Three attacks:—

I. The Admiralty inefficient. It is the most economically administered department of the state. The British Navy admittedly never so powerful before in history. The gunnery efficiency unparalleled. And the Navy so popular that it's as difficult to get into as the Kingdom of Heaven.

II. The distribution of the Fleet. Captain Mahan blesses it and the Germans hate it.

III. No war plans! As Euclid says, 'which is absurd'! Even that one chart you looked at yesterday is sufficient evidence! But there are the hundreds and hundreds of pages of print diagnosing every German symptom of war and stating the appropriate treatment.

Esher had heard much of the Peerage and says it would be stupendous folly. The House of Commons would obliterate him, but he (Beresford) knows the mob is his audience and that they love a Lord.[1]

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

178: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

April 5th, 1909

Private and Confidential

My beloved Lambert,

I write in violent haste to bless you for your letter. I've had an hour with McKenna this morning, and he counsels silence. I must say I don't like taking it lying down! He assures me of the Prime

[1] 'If they think they will shut Beresford's mouth by making him a Peer, they are grievously mistaken!' (Fisher to Knollys, March 30th, 1909). Neither Asquith nor the King thought it was the proper moment to reward Beresford for his past services. Beresford did not get his peerage until 1916. Fisher, asked by the Prime Minister through McKenna if he had any objection to a peerage for Beresford, had none; but he did object, as did the whole Board, to his being made an Admiral of the Fleet, which was another request of Beresford's. This mark of distinction he never did receive.

Minister's and Grey's complete confidence in me. He also said more I can't write, but which I will make a point of telling you when we meet, as I have always felt you at my back. Yes, as you suppose, there is [a] complete statement of the Admiralty case giving the FACTS before October 1904 and since. I think myself the enclosed spontaneous article by Corbett, which the late editor of the *XIXth Century* (Sir James Knowles) got written is as good as anything, though two years old.

Winsloe went and insulted that cad Armstrong in the Naval and Military Club, I believe, for quoting that private letter — so far as I know only Tweedmouth ever had a copy of it. It was printed for him, so far as I can remember. That Pollen is taking an active part in the matter, so I hear.[1] He has a large newspaper connection. Sir W. White and Custance are writing *The Times* articles signed 'Critic', and Arthur Lee, M.P., is supposed to be their coadjutor. I can hardly believe it.[2] McKenna said Beresford and Custance were not leaving a stone unturned to defame and injure me. On Saturday Sir A. Godley of the India Office[3] met me in the street and stopped to commiserate. I said I was not going to flee — I would have to be kicked out! '*Non fugimus — nos fugamur*' (We are not deserters — we are *outcasts*) is what the ancients said.[4]

Yours till Hell freezes,[5]

J. A. Fisher

[1] 'I had been told that Pollen's ramifications were extraordinary and his newspaper influence very considerable, and his being a Roman Catholic of immense support to him. I have consistently refused to have anything to do with him or see him' (Fisher to White, April 4th, 1909).

[2] 'The Case Against the Admiralty. By a Critic', Part I, had appeared in *The Times*, April 2nd. It attacked the 'one-man show' at the Admiralty since 1904 and urged the restoration of the 'principle of equality' among the Board members and an inquiry into Admiralty policy. Part II, on April 5th, was a critique of the major reforms. A spirited two-part 'Defence of the Admiralty. By a Correspondent' was published on April 12th and 17th, and, finally, a rejoinder by 'Critic' on April 24th. Fisher was certain that *The Times* had turned against him – that Beresford had won over Monypenny, 'of *The Times* directorate, and its coming Editor, I believe' (Fisher to McKenna, April 12th, 1909). (Monypenny did not become the Editor.) 'With Jews [Arthur Lee and Ralph D. Blumenfeld, Editor of the *Daily Express*, 1902-1932] and Jesuits [Pollen, Haldane] against one I don't wonder now at the defection of *The Times*!' (Fisher to White, April 4th, 1909).

[3] Sir Arthur Godley (afterwards first Baron Kilbracken), Under-Secretary of State for India, 1883-1909.

[4] 'As the old Romans said who were expelled from Rome when she was attacked!' (Fisher's note on a letter of 1916).

[5] Here is the origin of this unique close, which Fisher began to use in 1908. 'Once an officer in India wrote to me and ended his letter "Yours till Hell freezes". I used this forcible expression in a letter to Fisher, and he adopted it . . .' (Ponsonby: *Reflections of Three Reigns*, p. 131).

179: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Private and Secret [ca. April 8th, 1909]

Dear Mr. McKenna,

A thunder-clap half an hour after you left! Lord Morley took Jellicoe aside at the Club they both frequent for lunch, and told him he was greatly perturbed on my account, as he had a great personal regard for me, because an enquiry seemed imminent and unavoidable, and had gone so far that the constitution of the Commission had been fixed at six members of the House of Lords and six members of the House of Commons. Lord Morley asked Jellicoe if I was likely to be in town during the holidays, as he thought of seeing me. About an hour after, I heard from Garvin that a Monsieur Courdeux belonging to the Paris *Figaro* had told him of an interview with Beresford. Beresford said to Courdeux that he had sent an ultimatum to Mr. Asquith demanding an enquiry. Almost at the same time I got a typewritten communication from a reliable friend to the same effect. As the Prime Minister fenced with the Parliamentary Question on the subject and declined to answer when asked if he was satisfied with the Admiralty, it lends colour to Lord Morley's fears.

I don't want to disturb your holiday, so please don't answer. I just report events. It all may possibly be as much directed on you as on me, — that my going would, against my will and wishes, take the other Sea Lords, and that this would involve you in such exasperating difficulties as to be glad to quit (I sincerely hope not). Thursfield warned me yesterday of the cunning cleverness and animosity of Lloyd George. It looks as if the Prime Minister was contemplating throwing the Admiralty to the wolves! Arthur Lee, M.P., is going to stay with Lord Northcliffe next Saturday to Monday, hoping to get him against the Admiralty. I shall not say a word to anyone, nor to Lord Morley till he communicates direct with me.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

Lord Morley also emphatically added to Jellicoe that his decided opinion was that it was no case for outside interference or enquiry, but was between the Cabinet and Admiralty alone, and if the Cabinet had any reason for being dissatisfied with or doubting the Admiralty, they ought to get a new Board. Jellicoe told him that he could only say for himself that if there was any enquiry they would have to get another Controller. I think we had better 'sleep quiet in our beds' till you return!

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

180: TO MRS. J. A. SPENDER

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 10th, 1909

Dear Mrs. Spender,

Why do you tempt me? '*Vade retro, Satanas!*' I am 'Pooh-Bah' here and attending to my duty! but kindly thank Mr. and Mrs. Fry for enticing me to desert my post! They are noble people to do what they are doing. Personally, I have never been good, so I admire it more in other people.

Yes! as you say, 'What times we have all been having'! People prophesy I shall 'go under'. Well, if so, it will be with guns firing and colours flying! I won't flee — I'll be kicked out! '*Non fugimus, nos fugamur.*' ('We are not deserters, we are outcasts!') I think a fine epitaph one of Nelson's Captains: '*Death found him fighting*'!

Heaven gives us instincts. I think I told you a holy man gave me this from Pascal: '*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*' My instinct just now is to fight like blazes, but reason says, 'Peace — be still'!

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

J. F.

181: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

April 13th, 1909

My dear Corbett,

Your lamentable statement has not left my mind that your famous article in *Nineteenth Century* has done you harm,[1] and I have been thinking of writing to you of my remorse, but at 9 p.m. last night came Lord Esher, full of sending the selfsame article to Balfour (which he has done with a covering letter of praise), so I am not so down on my luck as I was in having injured you! Lord Morley has also read it and discussed its merits yesterday with Esher. 'Cast your bread upon the waters and it comes back after many days'! I think Esher is going to see Grey this morning with a copy of it.

There's a bit in it about the association of the War College with the Admiralty Intelligence Department under the personal guidance

[1] Corbett had written on April 4th: 'That article made me many unfriends. I have suffered in pocket and otherwise, but perhaps if they gave another opening I might be tempted again to interrupt the spade work which wants doing so badly for the Service, and for which the labourers are so few.'

of the First Sea Lord meeting the requirements of war study and war plans. It really is the case, and the continuous meetings we have of the committee of 8 and the continuous elaboration of war plans (I would like you to come and see one of them) has been convincing evidence to Sir E. Grey (who came to see me about it apropos of Beresford's assertions and Spenser Wilkinson's denunciations)[1] that all is right. But it has been suggested to me to give the whole organization some new name, and that the name 'Naval Intelligence Department' is a bad name, and 'Naval War College' a bad name also. If you have time, perhaps you will kindly give your thoughts to it, and some day let me see you for a few minutes. Don't trouble to answer.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

182: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

April 14th, 1909

Private

Dear Mr. McKenna,

I chanced to meet Ottley to-night when out for a walk. He had just got a note from Mr. Asquith's Private Secretary to say Sir Arthur Wilson had accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to be a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence. The first Ottley had heard of it. I am not able to interpret what it signifies. It is hardly courteous to those at the Admiralty to be given no inkling of the Prime Minister's intention. Is it part of the Beresford ultimatum to the Prime Minister as communicated to the *Daily Chronicle*?

I have a message from Lord Morley to dine with him at the Carlton in a private room. He apparently is going to throw in his lot with the Admiralty. Bellairs has been all the way to Biarritz to see Ponsonby, who is in attendance on the King. He didn't get any change out of Ponsonby, who says in his letter to me: 'He gave me the impression of being a catspaw for some one else'! Winston made another advance, but I declined. Lee, M.P., has done his worst with Northcliffe but has not succeeded so far, but a eunuch called H. W. Wilson has been working Northcliffe on Beresford's behalf with some effect. . . .

[1] Spenser Wilkinson, military historian, leader writer on military affairs for the *Morning Post*, ca. 1900-1914, and first Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford, 1909-1923. He was charging that no true war plans existed at the Admiralty.

My colleagues are all very kind and bloody-minded, but I tell them we must leave the campaign in your hands. My feeling now is not to leave the Admiralty till a file of Marines marches one out! . . . I hope you are enjoying your holiday, but we shall all be very glad when you are back, as there seems treachery in the air!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

183: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

April 19th, 1909

First Lord.

I think the enclosed sufficiently expresses what I have in my mind as the result of our long conversation of last night. I have written in the hope and belief that the Prime Minister's confidence is unabated. If otherwise, then the enclosed procedure would obviously not be the right one.

J. F.

[Enclosure]

Sir A. Wilson has accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister to serve on the Defence Committee, so that's a *fait accompli*. Presumably the Prime Minister only intends his attendance on such special occasions as he may desire. If constituted as a permanent naval adviser attending the Committee, the position of the First Sea Lord would become very difficult. Sir A. Wilson's position not analogous to Sir John French. Sir John French is on full pay and under the Chief of the General Staff and subordinate to him. The position would be similar if the Second Sea Lord were to be on the Defence Committee. However, it is not supposed that the Prime Minister intends by this appointment of Sir A. Wilson any alteration in the responsibility of the Board of Admiralty, and that this will be made clear. Sir A. Wilson would be summoned for such occasions as when his great experience and special capabilities would be of advantage. Even then the position seems embarrassing — the immediate purpose of Sir A. Wilson's appointment is assumed as being a friendly act on the part of the Prime Minister and not as an expression of want of confidence in the present Board of Admiralty or any of its members — but of course the fact of inviting Sir A.

Wilson to criticize the war plans of the Admiralty as member of a sub-committee of the Defence Committee cannot but bear that construction and will be so interpreted in the Navy, with a corresponding loss of Admiralty prestige and authority, and an undoubted blow to naval discipline. Lord Charles Beresford will not be reticent on the subject.

It is understood that the enquiry is to be limited to one specific allegation by Lord Charles Beresford, that there were no war plans during his two years' tenure of command of the Channel Fleet. The obvious rejoinder is why did he remain 24 hours in his position of responsibility if this were the case? Why did he not send in a war plan of his own, though repeatedly asked to do so? *There was a war plan!* It was discussed by Sir A. Wilson — and Sir A. Wilson's covering remarks were sent to Lord Charles Beresford. It is not only there was one war plan — *there were several* — each one providing for some other possible contingency, but as Sir A. Wilson acutely remarked, all such plans can only deal with the first opening of the war — immediately all becomes conditional on the enemy's first move. If the Prime Minister so limits the enquiry and makes obligatory the essential secrecy in bringing out all these war plans for this examination, though it's a course of action greatly to be deplored in the interests of the Navy, yet if the Prime Minister considers it desirable in the public interests, we have no alternative but to face the bad consequences for the sake of the good. It has to be noted that the elaborate war orders now in possession of Sir W. May,[1] and concurred in by him and by the Commander-in-Chief Atlantic Fleet also, are different to those that were in the possession of Lord Charles Beresford, due to the further development of the Home Fleet and a redisposition of the Atlantic Fleet always intended when Dover became available as a naval base. It is presumed that these war plans will not be made the subject of examination and possible publicity, but that the enquiry will be confined to the one specific allegation by Lord C. Beresford, that he had no war plans, and no other matter will be permitted to be imported into the enquiry. To discuss questions of policy with Lord Charles Beresford would be manifestly impossible.

[1] Admiral May and Vice-Admiral Bridgeman had switched appointments in March 1909 (-1911), May becoming Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet and Bridgeman becoming Second Sea Lord.

184: TO FREDERICK E. G. PONSONBY

April 24th, 1909

Private and Secret

My dear Ponsonby,

I have just received your letter of April 20th with the King's Commands 'that even under pressure' I will not think of resigning. I shall of course obey His Majesty, but it is almost past belief how Beresford has been pandered to. I understand the Prime Minister considers it a *coup de maître*! The Prime Minister without consulting the Admiralty decides on Sir A. Wilson being a Member of the Committee of Enquiry — a very good decision — but Beresford objects to him and he is taken off the Committee. Esher is especially invited to serve on the Committee at a personal interview by the Prime Minister and is appointed — Beresford objects and Esher's appointment is cancelled. Beresford summons as witnesses my own personal staff at Admiralty to cross-examine them as to the way I conduct business, and this is to be allowed. Other officers in the Admiralty are to be called by him for a similar purpose. What has this got to do with the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its readiness for war? Nothing whatever ! But the object is to discredit me — *he won't* — but that has nothing to do with the licence given him. It was thought all this would force me to resign. But I won't trouble you with any more on the personal point.

The Committee now consist of Mr. Asquith, Grey, Crewe, Haldane, and Morley. Next Tuesday is the first day. I enclose a paper *written two years ago* — it holds good now. Ever since it was written Beresford has continued the same insubordinate line of conduct. Nothing but a pack of cowards would have stood it. I have held on because the sole object in view was to get rid of me. The case is impregnable against Beresford. He knew Wilson would flatten him out. He vainly hopes unlearned civilians give him hopes of success. The paper I enclose has been circulated to the Committee with a covering memo by McKenna to bring it up to date. The whole Board are absolutely united. We shall only resign on the safety of the Country, not on Beresford or any other minor issue, but this enquiry is a blow to discipline and the prestige of the Admiralty, and yet the Navy has never before in its history been so powerful, so efficient, or so instantly ready for war!

Please submit my humble duty to the King.

Ever yours, J. A. Fisher

185: TO FREDERICK E. G. PONSONBY

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 4th, 1909

My dear Ponsonby,

I got your letter from Baiae and see the wisdom of the enquiry being confined to the Cabinet. We have had the first day of Beresford's cross-examination and roped him in on every single point so far, but the disquieting aspect is the obvious desire of the Committee to get him out of his mess. He refuses to answer questions when we get him into a tight place and makes long, irrelevant, wild speeches instead — or else he says the question is too absurd to answer — and the Committee let him have his way and don't insist on his answering. He makes the most malignant misstatements, and when we bring him to book, he appeals to Asquith whether his word ought to be doubted, etc., etc., and Asquith glosses over the matter and asks a question to get round the ugly corner. Of course there may be a low form of cunning in all this on the part of the Committee, to let Beresford see he is in a tight place and so head him off! But, remember, here is the Board of Admiralty put on its trial by a subordinate, with irreparable damage to its prestige and vital injury to Navy discipline, and we are to turn the other cheek to the smiter. Personally, I don't believe in the 'Sermon on the Mount' for managing the Fleet!

It's abundantly clear to me that what the Cabinet thinks of just now is the happy time they all had in that junk when Jonah was chucked overboard — there was calm and peace![1]

Ever yours,

J. F.

186: TO W. T. STEAD

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 6th, 1909

Private

My blessed Sheet Anchor!

I was at it till midnight, so had no time to write last night to bless you for your letter. I fear you are not wise in your own interests to back me! HOWEVER, IT MAKES ONE FEEL THE DEEPER!

[1] Ponsonby's reply (May 5th) was hardly what Fisher expected: 'Personally I am glad to hear that Beresford is having every possible chance. If, as I believe, your case is so strong, there is nothing to be gained by not allowing him to get off his chest all he has to say on the subject. It seems to me to strengthen your position very much if Beresford is allowed as much rope as he wants. The King however does not take the same view!'

SECRET. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THIS ENQUIRY IS PRO-BERESFORD! Think of the holy calm in that junk when they had pitched Jonah overboard! But isn't it really incredible that a serious enquiry by Cabinet Ministers should now be proceeding that the Country has been and still is in vital danger from Germany (this is Beresford's charge), with our Navy 3 to 4 times as strong, marvellous in its gunnery, and requiring only a few hours for its mobilization! The Admiralty being dislocated and the Navy in revolution because fearful of a windbag! The Press and the Public *à la* Beresford! 'The prophets prophesy falsely, the people love to have it so, and what shall we do in the end thereof?'

Anyhow, my dear Friend, although, Moses-like, your splendid fire is unabated, don't please injure yourself for my sake! (*It's cunning to get rid of me on Beresford and not on 'two keels to one'!*)

Yours till the Angels smile on us!

J. F.

187: TO MRS. REGINALD NEELD

Admiralty, Whitehall
[May? 1909]

Darling B.,

You've hit the nail on the head in your letter, as it will be political considerations that will guide the decision, not the good of the Navy, to which irreparable mischief is being done by parleying with mutiny and condoning it. If I had resigned, I should have done exactly what my enemies wanted and what would have suited the political situation, because my successor would have said we didn't want Dreadnoughts and that the pre-Dreadnoughts were better and we had enormous superiority in them, and so no more ships wanted! So there is no alternative but to hang on. I daresay Dorothy[1] told you what Ponsonby said on board the Yacht as to the King not allowing me to retire and what the Germans thought of Beresford, when Ponsonby was with the King in Berlin [February 1909]! It's rather good, as it supports Esher's famous letter. I hear 99 out of 100 in society and political circles think I shall be kicked out. *Nous verrons!* This is not much of a reward after effecting all that has been done! They can't point to one single thing that has failed.

[1] Dorothy Fisher Fullerton, the Admiral's second daughter.

It must be lovely in the country, but I really think I always prefer London, and I always think the parks equal to anything in the country. . . .

Y.l.f.

J. F.

188: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING

May 28th, 1909

My dear Goulding,

You have sent me a sweet letter! *You'll get your reward!* No one ever gives out sympathy without getting a dividend of 100 per cent! I will come by the 10:50 on June 27 and return by last train, so that is fixed and I shall enjoy myself. I am very happy, and I see VICTORY all round, though things look d—d black just at present! But we are going to conquer all the same. Our new Dreadnoughts will stagger humanity, as Old Kruger said! And we shall have the eight all right, but keep this secret, please! Not a particle of truth in the report I am going to retire [in October].[1] Put in by Beresford to cover his defeat in Committee of Enquiry — though he had been worsted, yet I had been kicked out! *It was very clever!* It will all pass off!

'These common people in the skies,
Where are they — when the moon doth rise.'[2]

My duty to your sister and love to Remnant.[3]

Yours till Hell freezes,

J. F.

[1] As Fisher wrote McKenna the same day: 'I want to stick to you now till the day you leave office, no matter when that is, and the Peerage can go to the devil! . . . Please don't talk of any other First Sea Lord till January 1911. That is my last word!'

[2] Fisher's memory was at fault here.

You common people of the skies,
What are you when the moon shall rise?

Fisher loved these 'imperishable lines' from Sir Henry Wotton (1598) in praise of Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia. He often quoted the preceding lines as well: 'You meaner beauties of the night/That poorly satisfy our eyes,/More by your number, than your light;'/.

[3] James F. (afterwards first Baron) Remnant, Conservative M.P., 1900-1928.

189: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

June 5th, 1909

Dear Mrs. McKenna,

... The King sent for me yesterday — a wet afternoon and he wanted someone to talk to, I think. We wandered for two hours from Chili — no, it's '*China to Peru*'! (If you don't look out, he'll make the First Lord a Peer and give him the Victorian Order, as he has heard of his speech before the Beresfordian Committee!) Beresford is too lovely. He told a friend of Bridgeman's that beads of frightened perspiration as big as billiard balls fell from the brows of the First Lord!

I don't think I have any news to tell you except that Soveral,[1] Knollys, and Esher gave me a dinner to keep my spirits up, and informed me I was a co-respondent in a divorce case and that will be the next sensation! (*What a time the First Lord will have!*) Knollys says it don't matter about it not being true, as it will make me the most popular man in the Country! I told the King and he calmly said he knew all about it! I think Beresford must have disguised himself *à la* Jacob as the First Sea Lord!

(N. B. Please don't send this letter to Sir G. Armstrong!)

In violent haste, Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

190: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

June 12th, 1909
4:30 a.m.

... I wish you could find out if Beresford blackmailed Asquith after meeting of Committee. We sat till nearly 7, with Custance spitting venom all the time at the First Sea Lord, and Beresford requested a private interview with Asquith at end of meeting. (I got the idea of blackmail!) ... McKenna has most wonderfully enhanced his reputation amongst his most powerful colleagues in the Cabinet. *I'm his blessing in disguise!* Custance went back to Cornwallis and Keith,[2] etc. That damned him! Why not Noah! Old Haldane shut his eyes and slept. The King has sent a dear letter and

[1] The Marquis de Soveral, the very charming and able Portuguese Minister in London, 1891-1895, 1897-1910, and a member of the King's inner circle. Soveral, Knollys, Esher, and Fisher held regular quarterly dinners – always the same four.

[2] Admirals Sir William Cornwallis and Viscount Keith were contemporaries of Nelson.

adds, '*Don't print this*'! Isn't he sweet? *What wonderful friends I have!* It's a marvel! All I do is to kick their shins!

Yours,

J. F.

191: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

June 15th, 1909

Private

My beloved E.,

I'm improving the shining hour, having a few moments respite from McKenna (who sticks to me now like a leech!), to tell you the news of this morning — that Asquith gave out at the Committee that he is going to call Wilson next time we meet, which is June 24, to give evidence on the evidence, and he also 'caved in' to Beresford and permitted Captain Campbell[1] (the Prince of Wales's chum) to be called by Beresford on trade protection — a matter not in the terms of reference at all, or ever before quoted by Beresford (a striking example of the 'fishing' nature of such enquiries as this). However, we have nothing to fear except the damnable deplorableness of a subordinate inside the Admiralty being called to give evidence against the First Sea Lord. Custance completely obfuscated both himself and the Committee. Beresford held forth as to his intended public address on June 30. The Prime Minister seems in a blue funk of him.

Yes, we made a good job of Saturday,[2] but the two most noticeable things of all were never noticed:—

(i) The swarm of destroyers going 20 knots past the *Dreadnought* found themselves suddenly confronted by a lot of passenger steamers and yachts, which at the last moment got right in their way — the accidents might have been intense — but the young chaps [the destroyer commanders] kept their nerve and their speed and scooted through the eye of the needle, just grazing them all. It was splendid to see and made my heart warm! (N. B. A Press delegate — the *Toronto Globe*, I think — seized me by the arm and said, '*Sir, I see the glint of battle in your eye!*')

(ii) I saw the Speaker of the House of Commons[3] being bundled

[1] Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Henry H. Campbell, Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence (head of the Trade Division), 1906-1909.

[2] A review of the Home and Atlantic Fleets was held at Spithead on June 12th in honour of the delegates to the Imperial Press Conference.

[3] James W. Lowther (afterwards first Viscount Ullswater), Speaker of the House of Commons, 1905-1921.

into a 'char-à-banc' holding 24 other promiscuous persons by a Bluejacket. Truly a democratic sight!

Can't write more except to bless you on your kind letter. KENNEDY JONES A-1![1]

Yours till a cinder!

J. F.

192: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

June 20th, 1909

Dear First Lord,

I don't want to harass you, but I wake this moment with the all-pervading sense of victory, provided by *pre-arrangement* with the Prime Minister before Beresford opens his mouth next Thursday morning you can get in your 'crowning-of-the-edifice' speech:—

(1) Incorporating Wilson.
(2) Flattening out Campbell and commerce.
(3) Exposing scrapping fallacy.

The great thing is to get in *first* with the Committee and let Beresford have the 'leavings'! The Machiavellian plea being to make the case clear to Beresford before he offers any remarks to the Committee.

You have not denied what Wilson states — that the intermediate stages of the present organization and distribution of the Fleet were unsatisfactory — *they were steps on the way*. For political reasons those steps were slow, *but there has been no retracing of steps!* (*'Vestigia nulla retrorsum!'*) We had an end in view. We've got there! All hands approve!

Campbell is hardly worth notice. It's pure 'Intelligence,' *not war*, that he deals of. He didn't even know the *Bremen*'s name! As for his scheme, it's a case of three Marine Officers! and I am even now doubtful whether Lloyd's wouldn't be the preferable agency. As for the delay in dealing with the paper, I am only sorry it was not delayed longer. However, Crease is preparing a symposium.

[1] Kennedy Jones, associated with the Harmsworth Press (*Daily Mail*, etc.) since the 1890s as co-proprietor and as *L'Éminence Grisé* of Lord Northcliffe. Fisher and 'K. J.', kindred spirits, had first met in March 1909. This extract from a J. L. Garvin letter to Fisher (ca. June 14th, 1909) may explain the source of the Admiral's satisfaction: '. . . nothing ever pleased me much more than the jolly scene at Victoria platform. [Fisher, along with the delegates to the Imperial Press Conference, representatives of the English press, and other guests, had assembled at Victoria Station on the morning of June 12th to go down by special train to Portsmouth.] I met Kennedy Jones running from the rear of the train and shouting, "Let's give him a cheer".'

But my object in writing now at 3 a.m. is to induce you to repeat the dose as previously so deliciously given to the Committee! to read Crease's paper on Saturday; to dictate your own assimilation of the facts; to saturate yourself on Sunday with the subject, and to give it to us on Monday in the Bovril form, for on Tuesday and Wednesday you won't have time — Defence Committee, Cabinet, etc. Wednesday evening I suggest you keep free to consider Beresford's speech made that afternoon at London Chamber of Commerce. Unless any direct aspersions on Admiralty, I presume you'll keep clear of the Percy Scott business. . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

193: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

[early July 1909]

Beloved E.,

Don't fail to send McKenna your idea of a Fleet circular [after the Committee's report]. *He would like it*, though he may not follow it. He told me yesterday if the slightest mud thrown at Admiralty by Asquith in his report, he would resign! *But what use resigning when the mud has been thrown?* The point is to make clear to Asquith beforehand 'no compromise', and he ought to see the Admiralty through! I'm not doubting Asquith, but the line of the powerful social influences backing Beresford is to get Asquith to put in 'soft gander' for Beresford. We can't shoot Campbell and Hulbert[1] if the

[1] It was discovered that Campbell and Captain Arthur R. Hulbert, Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence (head of the War Division), 1909 (and prior to that Beresford's intelligence officer at the Admiralty), had been supplying Beresford with ammunition – official papers which they had no right to communicate to him. Thanks to one or both of them, towards the end of the Inquiry, on July 1st, Beresford had produced a copy of a letter from Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) George Egerton, Commander-in-Chief of the Cape of Good Hope Squadron, 1908-1910, to the Admiralty, complaining of his shortage of ships. 'Knollys thinks you ought to give Campbell leave at once as well as Hulbert. I never mentioned one word, but the King and Knollys knew all about Hulbert and Campbell and Admiral Egerton. I hope you'll get your knife into Egerton – he is another of May's recommendations for employment!' (Fisher to McKenna, July 3rd, 1909). But nothing happened to Egerton. Indeed, he served as Second Sea Lord in 1911, in McKenna's last year at the Admiralty. Hulbert was ordered by the First Lord to proceed upon leave (July 2nd-October 11th), and on October 12th both Hulbert and Campbell were put on half-pay. The motive for the first move was disciplinary; for the second, a reorganization of N.I.D., which involved the abolition of the Trade Division and the transfer of the work of the War Division to the Naval Mobilization Department of N.I.D. Beresford later charged that 'the real reason for carrying out the "reorganization" ' was the removal of the two officers (Beresford to Asquith, October 23rd, 1909). See below, p. 247, n. 1.

head of the gang is praised or his mutiny condoned. Stead in *Review of Reviews* is tip-top on this point. As the half-pay Admiral said to Ward Hunt when First Lord [1874-1877] and the Admiral thought he was going to be passed over. Mr. Ward Hunt indignantly said, 'Admiral Brown, I've not yet made the appointment in question. I don't understand your coming to me complaining before you're hurt.' Admiral Brown: 'Well, it [would] be no use my making a bloody row if you *had* made the appointment!'

Yours for ever, J. F.

194: TO J. A. SPENDER

July 2nd, 1909

My dear Spender,

I hope it is not improper or too presumptuous to offer you my admiration for your article last night on the Beresfordian oration.[1] IT'S SPLENDID — and almost as good as your famous article on 'The Government and the Admiralty' — and the last part of the article as good as the first, *that every penny spent on the Army is a penny taken from the Navy*, and millions of Armies futile if the Navy is not powerful beyond all question!

Reiteration is the Secret of Conviction!

Repetition is the Soul of Journalism!

This is a secret — only last Tuesday we had to deal in Defence Committee on the defence of Hong Kong with an insidious military scheme fostered by a silly Admiral to provide for the British Navy being wiped out! It's really damnable! So kindly keep pegging away. It's the only way!

Yours till the Angels smile on us, J. F.

195: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall

Private and Secret July 3rd, 1909

My dear E.,

Do you think the Prince of Wales at all realizes what would happen if the Public (*and especially the Radical Party*) knew he was actively

[1] A *Westminster Gazette* leader of July 1st ridiculed Beresford's speech of June 30th before the London Chamber of Commerce, in which he had demanded a £60,000,000 programme spread over five years. 'We have read and re-read Lord Charles Beresford's speech, with a sincere desire to understand its meaning, and find ourselves at each reading more hopelessly befogged.'

taking Beresford's side and saying I must go (as he is now doing and openly said at Royal Yacht dinner last Saturday), and that his bosom friend Captain Campbell had been doing 'Judas'! perpetually at my house, and selling me all the time to Beresford!

The latest development is that Sir G. Armstrong has a pile of my private letters to various people — not printed or typewritten but *the original letters*, so he says, which he is going to produce unless I agree to go in October! Some of the letters stolen and some given (so I am told!). However 'hot' they may be, I don't regret a word I ever wrote, and I believe my countrymen will forgive me. *Anyhow I won't be blackmailed!* There was murder in the King's eye when I told him (*but I didn't tell him all!*). Dear old Knollys was splendid. *I just love him! I am going to fight to the finish! Heaven bless you for your help.*

Yours, J. F.

196: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
July 13th, 1909

First Lord.

I suggest for your consideration whether the Prime Minister might not see enclosed just come from May with advantage, especially as to the efficiency of the nucleus crew ships under the strain of dense fog, intricate navigation, and hard-pressed manœuvres (Curzon[1] was out with his Fleet to the minute in the densest fog he had ever known, and you see May confirms this as to the fog). No shore-going mind can take in what it means for over 300 vessels to be ramping about under these conditions, close up and against each other, and it signifies nerve and efficiency all round from top to bottom and spells victory in quite big letters! The absolute total absence of defects in a mass of 374 vessels is simply unparalleled and almost incredible. It extorts from the pessimistic May that it's splendid! It's a great joke his allusion to the Blue Fleet being detained 48 hours.[2] Fancy asking the German Fleet to hold on a few hours till you were quite ready!

Yours truly, J. A. Fisher

[1] Admiral Curzon-Howe was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1908-1910.

[2] 'I still much regret that the Blue Fleet were not detained for 48 hours, as that would have given the cruisers and destroyers plenty of work' (May to Fisher, July 10th, 1909).

N. B. This letter [May's] will back up Bridgeman's evidence as to efficiency and readiness of the Home Fleet in *to-day's* meeting of the Committee.

197: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Secret July 28th, 1909

Dear First Lord,

Late last night I heard from Esher that he had been told by a reliable person high in Society that Beresford was meditating 'a diabolical personal coup' against you and me! He, Esher, went at midnight last night by appointment to see the gentleman, and apparently Beresford has got hold of some Admiralty papers about shortage of ammunition, especially cordite, which he thinks will upset you, if not the Government. (He is thinking of Brodrick and the cordite, I suppose!!)[1]

I will see Bacon[2] this morning. It's very unpleasant our officers being seduced!

The *Morning Post*, *Standard*, and *Daily Express* are to start the campaign on Thursday. Please not to mention Esher's name. The funny thing is that it's a German 'high in English Society' who let the cat out of the bag! So far as I know, though, we got rid of immense quantities of doubtful cordite, yet we are adequately provided for. Obviously the previous large stock we held of a deteriorating article was unwise.

In great haste, Yours,

J. F.

198: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Private July 29th, 1909

My dear Arnold White,

. . . Beresford is trying all he knows to work up again![3] When the

[1] On June 21st, 1895, the Rosebery Government had been defeated in the Supply debates on a motion moved by William St. John Brodrick (afterwards first Earl of Midleton) regarding the supply of cordite.

[2] Rear-Admiral Bacon was Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes, 1907-1909.

[3] That day's *Times* and other newspapers carried a letter from Beresford reacting to the Government's announcement of July 26th (see above, p. 208). 'The Government, in postponing the construction of the four "conditional" battleships, have lost the last opportunity which their procrastination left to them for securing the safety of the country and of the Empire . . . The six battleships which . . . ought, as the *minimum* required to ensure safety, to be laid down next year must be delayed in consequence [and] . . . may have the most serious consequences.'

Board of Admiralty have pledged their word that the extra 4 ships will be completed by *March 1912* (*they will really be ready sooner!*), it stands to reason they must be practically begun in December or January at the latest. The earning of money is all humbug. Again, when Sir E. Grey, the Prime Minister, and McKenna have each solemnly asseverated that the EIGHT this year in no way whatever affect next year's programme, what rot to talk the rubbish that Beresford does in his letter to the *Standard* this morning! As to stores, ammunition, destroyers, and cruisers, we are fully and adequately provided. Read *The Fleet* for August. I don't know Yexley, but he knows all about it. The proof of the pudding, as he says, is in the manœuvres! Any wise man can reckon up what they mean!

Yours till a cinder,

J. F.

199: TO LIONEL YEXLEY

H.M. Yacht *Victoria & Albert*
August 1st, 1909

Private

Dear Yexley,

. . . The *Observer* has hit the right nail on the head in its leading article recommending the 'Indomitable' type for colonial imitation, and not the small Beresfordian cruisers, which like ants will all be eaten up by one 'Indomitable' armadillo, which puts out its tongue and licks them all up! (The bigger the ant, the more placid the digestive smile!)

I asked the First Lord to see you some time back. I think he will shortly. I want him to get from you *first-hand* all that the Bluejacket, the Marine, and the Warrant Officer still lack! I've told him it's better for him to talk straight with you, as I am supposed to be rabid in my advocacy of the further steps that might be taken. My ground is simply this — *don't wait for agitation!* Things have got to come — do it yourself and not let it be forced on you! The true secret of successful administration is the intelligent anticipation of agitation! *My* first plank is to vastly increase the number of Warrant Officers amongst Seamen and *Marines*, and also the number of commissions. However, I will see you some day. . . .

In great haste, Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

200: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

H.M. Yacht *Victoria & Albert*
August 3rd, 1909

Private
My beloved E.,

. . . The Mouse was able to help the Lion yesterday, as the King got on to you in regard to vile attempts of jealousy as to your being on the Defence Committee.[1] The King is *certainly* A1 in sticking to his friends! but you have always said this yourself to me when I have been down on my luck!

All has gone most splendidly in all ways, and the King is enormously gratified at the magnificent show of the Fleet put before the Emperor [of Russia]. I told the Emperor it was a fine avenue! — 18 miles of ships — the most powerful in the world and none of them more than 10 years old!

Here is an incident: a friend of mine, who doesn't know Beresford except by sight, crossed over from Southampton to Cowes on Saturday night in the same steamer. Beresford in a loud voice harangued a party he had with him. My friend said not a case of eavesdropping at all, as all could hear 'that he, Beresford, meant to have Fisher out of the Admiralty by March next. He had expected to have him out this next October; unfortunately, a great personage was his friend, but Fisher was being found out, and he (Beresford) had got Pretyman and Lee in the palm of his hand and they were going to turn Fisher out.' Can you imagine a fellow being such a blatant fool as to talk out loud of the King, etc., like this? . . .

I don't think, notwithstanding all your blessed kindness, that the 'P. C.' will come off! I think it would be a wise thing for the sake of the Admiralty and the Navy, as resuscitating discipline, and I don't mind confessing that one feels sore at want of *open* backing by the Government, for undoubtedly there was much parleying with Beresford before McKenna had the courage to kick him out.

I can't write more — just off sailing with the King and Czar.

Yours,

J. F.

[1] There had been criticism in the House of Commons on July 29th of Esher's membership on the Committee of Imperial Defence. Dilke charged that, as a non-official member, Esher was not subject to official responsibility. Bellairs remarked: 'The Prime Minister referred to him as an expert, but I do not know on what question he is an expert. He certainly is not an expert on naval or military questions.' For Esher's reply to this letter, see *Esher*, II, 398.

201: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

[South Tyrol]
August 19th, 1909

My dear First Lord,

I am not going to give you all my mind about the Beresford Report, which I have just assimilated, as I don't see you can do anything with advantage to the Admiralty, or without injury to yourself, BUT *it's a cowardly document!* It ignores Beresford's want of loyalty at the outset of the two years, and so how could the Admiralty give him its confidence, and the poisonous allusion to the Naval War Staff in the concluding passages is a covert onslaught on the Admiralty, utterly neglecting the big business the Admiralty did in starting the War College, and practically showing forth the great advance in strategical thinking by the concentration of our forces instead of their previous dispersal. Not a word of commendation for the Nucleus Crew System and the demonstration of its efficacy year after year in the annual manœuvres. No downright words for discipline, and a clear lead given for Beresford to pose as having accomplished his ideas and sacrificed himself in so doing! I am bitterly mistaken in the 5 men who signed the Report. I *thought* they were great men — they are great cowards! The drawing-rooms of London have prevailed! When the Prime Minister cross-examined Beresford on the Campbell incident at the last meeting, the Committee had in mind a far different report to that they have now signed. Please don't bother to answer this. Luckily there is a Hell, where all things are compensated for! Sometimes the Hell is on earth. I hope the 5 will have it here instead of waiting!

Please give my love to Mrs. McKenna if permissible.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

The Times, the one and only newspaper that seized the kernel of the question — namely, DISCIPLINE.

202: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

[South Tyrol]
August 28th, 1909

My dear E.,

I have just this moment got your letter of August 24 and bless you for it. You use the words I used in describing the Beresford Report

to McKenna — that '*5 Cowards signed it!*' Worse than that are the two base innuendos against the Admiralty which permitted Carson & Co. to draw up Beresford's reply in *Times* of August 17.[1]

I. That the Admiralty did not give its confidence to Beresford. How could we when he abused that confidence within 24 hours of assuming command?

II. The *suggestio falsi* that the Admiralty had been wanting in strategical thought — whereas we had effected the immense advance of establishing the Naval War College and gave evidence of practical strategy in effecting the concentration of our Fleets instead of the previous state of dispersion. No such redistribution of strategical force since the days of Noah!

But worse still — not one word of commendation for the Admiralty for its unparalleled work in gaining fighting efficiency and instant readiness for war by the institution of the Nucleus Crew System — the introduction of battle practice — the unexampled advance in gunnery (the *Invincible* with her 12-inch guns hitting the target 1/14th her own size 15 *times out of 18 at 5 miles*, she herself going 20 knots and the target also moving at an unknown speed and unknown course) and getting rid of 150 [160] vessels that could neither fight nor run away. *Not one word of appreciation of all this by the Committee!* and yet they had the practical result before them in the grand manœuvres of 374 vessels manœuvring in fogs and shoals without a single mishap or a single defect, and 96 submarines and torpedo craft on the East Coast making invasion ridiculous! No — it has been a bitter disappointment — more bitter because each of the five members of the Committee so expressive to me and to others of the complete victory of the Admiralty. *Cowards all!* It's the one redeeming feature that *The Times* came down decidedly on the right side of the fence! the one and only paper that got at the kernel of the matter. *Discipline!*

I fear McKenna is powerless. He told me just before I left that Prime Minister and the rest of them dead against him now. *Keep this private.* The whole Cabinet want to get rid of him. *Lloyd George*

[1] Beresford's letter in *The Times* (August 17th) (see above, p. 213) stated his satisfaction with the report, took credit for a number of reforms that had resulted from his 'suggestions' to the Admiralty over the past two years and his letter to the Prime Minister after his 'dismissal', and denied that there was 'one word' in his official communications which 'could be construed into disrespect, disloyalty, and indiscipline . . . The authority of the Admiralty must be paramount. But it is the duty of the Commander-in-Chief if he thinks plans, allocations, and numbers of ships are inefficient, or are insufficient to enable him to carry out the orders he may receive from authority, to make respectful representations to that effect'.

is now supreme. I fear also that Asquith won't pay much attention to the King. Putting personal feelings absolutely aside, it really is *wanted* that the First Sea Lord should be openly backed up *if the discipline of the Navy is to be re-established!* The following are rattling good words spontaneously from Fritz Ponsonby [August 21st]:—

> If Smith-Dorrien [commanding] at Aldershot wrote a letter to the Prime Minister and brought accusations of incompetency against Haldane and the Army Council which he failed to substantiate, there would only be one end to him.

I wonder what dear old Knollys thinks of the whole matter? I have not liked to disturb his holiday. Besides, what good is it? Asquith won't do anything for *justice.* Only *fear* moves him and his four colleagues! They are such d—d fools in their own interest not to squash Beresford . . . Had the Committee utterly smashed and discredited Beresford, they would not have had to fight him over again, as they now will have to do!

Heaven bless you.

Yours for ever, but *disappointed* and *disgusted!*

J. F.

203: TO REAR-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES OTTLEY

[South Tyrol]
August 29th, 1909

My dear Ottley,

Your letter just arrived and I greatly appreciate the motive that penned it. I admit all the points you make. *Political sagacity means Naval Discipline.* Let Discipline go and Politics triumph! . . . Observe also that the Committee, by not squashing Beresford when they had the chance and so utterly discrediting him thereby in the face of all men, have given Beresford a fresh lease of insubordinate agitation. He is going to stump Canada against Admiralty policy,[1] and Bridgeman writes me of a letter from Beresford against the Admiralty to be produced shortly by the Lord Mayor in the City. However, my dear Ottley, I don't despair, as I hear from a reliable source that Balfour (*as is to be expected*) has a stronger sense of the good of

[1] Beresford had left for Canada on August 20th, where he was to open the Toronto Industrial Exhibition.

the Navy than the Prime Minister and his four colleagues on the Committee. You confess your own feelings of what was done to the Navy in your letter, not had I ever any doubt on that point — indeed, I have said all along that the crowning mercy of the situation was your advisory position and undoubted and well-merited weight with the Committee. To that Esher says 'ditto'! The two points I can't get over are the Committee's two *suggestio falsi*:—

I. That the Admiralty did not give its confidence to Beresford, *but how could we?* He abused that confidence almost daily from the time of hoisting his flag, and *when Mr. McKenna asked the Cabinet to dismiss Beresford because of his insubordinate attitude*, THE CABINET REFUSED!

II. The damnable inference in the concluding passage of the Report that the Admiralty were wanting in strategical thought! Whereas you know the Herculean effort needed to establish the Naval War College at Portsmouth which began in October 1904, and the practical proof of Admiralty strategical thought is superlatively manifested by the Admiralty policy of concentration of our Fleets instead of the previous dispersion.

Everyone now says, 'Well, anyhow, Beresford has done ONE good thing — he has started a naval strategy, which was non-existent before'! The Committee distinctly imply this in their Report. Again there is not one single word of commendation of all that the Admiralty has done in the last 5 years, as evidenced by the results of 374 vessels without a defect or mishap amidst great difficulties of navigation in the manœuvres, the biggest practical proof that could be given of the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war. Even the unfriendly *Manchester Guardian* says of Beresford's letter of August 17, communicated to the whole Press of the Empire, 'How could what was dangerous to the Empire in April [when Beresford wrote the Prime Minister] be perfectly satisfactory in August?' when Beresford claims he has put all right by going before the Committee! Nevertheless (as I said before), I see the force of your points, but it is the act of cowards, not of brave men! *Balfour would not have done it!*

Heaven bless you!

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

204: TO COMMANDER THOMAS E. CREASE[1]

September 9th, 1909

Private
Dear Crease,

Your letter just came and your concluding words make me answer at once in the midst of packing for a start in a few hours' time: 'I am still very seedy and can't get right again.' I enclose you a letter to a very great friend of mine, and the *best* doctor in Austria — he can take you into his house at Karlsbad, but you must *start off at once,* there is still a full month there of favourable weather. I don't care what it is that may be the matter with you, *but this I am absolutely certain of* — that Dr. Kraus will either cure you at Karlsbad or put you on the right line to go elsewhere to get cured. He is wonderfully reasonable in his terms, so have no anxiety about money. Besides, what is money compared with health. If you haven't got it — the money — I have. I'll charge you 40 per cent usury if you like! *But go at once. . . .*

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

Kraus cured a man sentenced to death by all London doctors.

205: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

September 13th, 1909

My dear E.,

Your letter of September 8 just arrived, and what pleases me most is the King having sent for you, and your 1½ hours' breakfast and afterwards driving with him, because, as no doubt you know, that underhand sneak Bellairs (*and some others*) started a propaganda against you which fell absolutely flat, and it's a rattling good thing the King making much of you in this way, as it gets about, *and without question he, the King, now largely moulds the public will!*

As to your letter in regard to myself, it of course gives me great joy that the King gives me his blessing, and also dear Knollys's wonderful fidelity to me is a miracle! (I always think of an incident

[1] Fisher's advice in the letter that follows was not taken: Crease did not go. He went on the retired list in February 1910, but became Fisher's Naval Assistant when the Admiral returned to Whitehall, 1914-1915. The letter is a good illustration of Fisher's concern for the well-being of his friends and associates, and this at a time when his mind was so preoccupied.

long ago when he calmly ignored a curious effusion of mine to the King and put the letter in the fire without saying a word to me till long afterwards! I all the time joyful — thinking I had done splendidly!)

Keep what follows private. It's interesting and valuable! As you know, Pretyman has been the working man on the Budget, and Austen Chamberlain, Bonar Law,[1] etc., etc., nowhere, so he is in the inner ring of the Tories now. You also know that Spender of the *Westminster Gazette* is the 'biggest buy' in the journalistic world of the Radicals. Within the last 48 hours I have again heard from Pretyman and also from a friend who is with Spender at Étretat that they each have the same absolute opinion (from different points of view) that Lloyd George has scored over the Budget and is coming out on top! Observe how Lloyd George made Asquith climb down over the licensing clauses. Asquith says, 'Drastic, short, and sharp' will be the action! George holds up his little finger and it ain't! Well! I'm no politician, only a babe in the wood, but even a baby can see that Lloyd George means a speedy dissolution, because the Budget has 'caught on' and he will win at the Elections, and Asquith will have to be Lord Chancellor, deeply to Haldane's disgust, who wants that billet. George, Prime Minister (see how Grey has knuckled down to him, so he is no opponent!). Winston will be Chancellor of the Exchequer, but Winston abhors Haldane and will bring out his Army Paper again. I don't quite know who will be First Lord of the Admiralty, *but it won't be McKenna!*

You will at once say: What is the First Sea Lord going to do? Answer — *nothing!* It is the ONLY course to follow! I have thought it all out most carefully and decided to keep absolutely dumb. When a new Admiralty patent appears in the *London Gazette* without my name in it, I pack up and walk out and settle down in the Tyrol. Temperature 70° in the shade and figs ten a penny, and wear all my white tunics and trousers! McKenna, to whom I am absolutely devoted, may force my hand to help him. In view of all he has risked for me (he was practically out of the Cabinet for 24 hours at one time! *This is a fact*), I am ready to go to the stake for him; but if he is well advised, he also will be dumb.

There, I think I've made my 'confession of faith'! Yes, as you say (and as McKenna says), Beresford is 'in the street'! Stead (who has not written to me at all) puts it intuitively well in enclosed extract in

[1] Andrew Bonar Law, Conservative M.P. from 1900, later Leader of the Conservative Party, 1911-1921, and Prime Minister, 1922-1923.

Review of Reviews just out! I am keeping ready to go back to Admiralty at 5 minutes' notice if McKenna wants me. I am sending him schemes for next year's Estimates — a good thing, I consider, for him to show his hand in case he is either kicked out or shuffled into another office.

I am so surprised how utterly both the Cabinet and the Press have so failed to see the '*inwardness*' of the new '*Pacific Fleet*'![1] I had a few momentous words in private with Sir Joseph Ward (the Prime Minister of New Zealand) [1906-1912]. *He saw it!* It means *eventually* Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Cape (that is, South Africa), and India *running a complete Navy*! We manage the job in Europe. They'll manage it against the Yankees, Japs, and Chinese, as occasion requires out there!

The very wonderful thing is that dear old Kelvin[2] and the First Sea Lord wanted 'Indomitables' alone and *not Dreadnoughts*; but we had a compromise, as you know, and got 3 'Indomitables' with the Dreadnoughts; and all the world now, headed by A. K. Wilson, have got 'Indomitables' on the brain! Hip! Hip! Hurrah!

Yours,

J. F.

Walter Long hopes to be First Lord of the Admiralty, with Beresford as First Sea Lord! . . .

[1] The Imperial Defence Conference of August 1909 had approved a scheme to remodel the squadrons maintained in Far Eastern waters. A Pacific Fleet was to be set up, to consist of the East Indies and China squadrons, owned and controlled by the Admiralty, and an Australian squadron, owned and controlled by the Commonwealth Government. Each squadron was to comprise, with variations, a battle cruiser, three second-class cruisers, six destroyers, and three submarines. Australia and New Zealand, which had originally planned to contribute a dreadnought each, agreed to substitute 'Indomitables', one for the China squadron, the other for the Australia squadron. As regards Canada, it was considered that her double seaboard rendered the provision of a fleet unit of the same kind unsuitable for the present. Canada was to make a start with a force of second-class cruisers and destroyers, divided between the Atlantic and the Pacific. On Fisher's general attitude towards colonial navies: 'Of course the real culprit is A. K. Wilson, who will not understand that our great Colonies are practically independent nations and are not going to subscribe to other people's Navies' (Fisher to Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, February 10th, 1914).

[2] The first Baron Kelvin, the world-renowned physicist (d. 1907), had been one of the civilian members of Fisher's Design Committee (1905). 'Of all the famous men I have known, Lord Kelvin had the greatest brain' (*Memories*, p. 251).

206: FROM VISCOUNT KNOLLYS

Craig Gowan
Balmoral, N. B.
September 19th, 1909

Private
My dear Fisher;

. . . I felt so disgusted with the Report of the Beresford Committee that I really could not make up my mind to write to you about it, but I can assure you I felt deeply for you, as you have been most unjustly treated. I was in hopes that the draft report, as it was originally prepared, would have been substantially adopted, but Asquith 'watered it down' to such an extent that it amounts to a verdict in Beresford's favour, and it has given him the opportunity, which he has not been slow to avail himself of, to declare publicly that the Report was favourable to him.

If it is in his favour, it must be unfavourable to the Admiralty, and poor McKenna is in such a ticklish position that if he had remonstrated, it is very probable that Asquith, with the applause of the two moving spirits in the Cabinet, L. George and W. Churchill, would have got rid of him. The fact is the Committee, as I have always said, were afraid of Beresford, and this has been proved by their treatment of him when he was under examination, and by the Report itself.

The King has asked McKenna to come to Balmoral as Minister in Attendance, which I am very glad of, as it is a sort of compliment to him and the Admiralty and will show everybody that H. M. approves of what he has done. . . .

Yours ever,

Knollys

207: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Grand Hôtel & Royal
Siena
September 30th, 1909

Dear Mrs. McKenna,

I've just seen in the paper that you are left desolate (as I know it's only a bachelors' party at Balmoral), so it occurred to me I would break in on your solitude.

This Siena, where I now am, is a wonderful place! If you have

been here, it's no use my saying anything, and if you have not been here you won't believe me, so I only say that the Mangia Tower, which rises up to Heaven, is worth coming 1,083 miles from London to see!

It's only a few days now before I see you, when I hope you are going to have as good a holiday as I have had, unless spoilt by electioneering; but I can't a bit understand it why there is to be an Election. Mr. Balfour don't want an Election — *he isn't ready!* and why should Mr. Asquith want one and not hold on another two years to reap the fruits of the harvest? I can understand Lloyd George and Winston wanting an Election, with the object of making Mr. Asquith Lord Chancellor! However, I am getting out of my depth!

Perhaps you don't know it, but there's book-binding at Siena, and I found enclosed last night in a back alley in a little workshop, where probably they have been book-binding since Romulus and Remus were fed by the she-wolf! (N. B. Observe Romulus and Remus, on first page of this letter! being the city arms!) In this book you might write down your collection of 'wise saws and modern instances'! E.g., 'History is a record of exploded ideas', 'The pavement of life is strewed with orange peel', and that wisest of all wise sayings of Abraham Lincoln, 'You can fool *all* the people *part* of the time; you can fool *part* of the people *all* the time; but you can't fool *all* the people *all* the time', and 'A man hates most whom he has wronged most', and 'The liar thinks all men liars'. *N. B. He is punished by his own sin!* 'By whatsoever a man sinneth, by the same shall he be punished.' 'Your battle ground should be your drill ground' (whether war or society!). 'The best is the cheapest.' '*Solvitur ambulando*', and so forth, which last motto I've laid much to heart lately, as I have been getting such pressing advice what to do! *I am going to do exactly what the First Lord of the Admiralty tells me to do!* If he says, 'Best all round for you to go to-morrow morning,' then I get up at daylight and go. If he says, 'Stay and wait events,' I stay! I think your sapient mind will answer to this! But, as I said to someone, I go further. If he said to me, 'Chop off your own head,' I would! Didn't he chop off his own head nearly and was practically 24 hours out of the Cabinet? and also risked his head over the first few days of the Beresford Committee. (When I began this letter I had no idea of writing this. It has slipped out! You can burn as soon as read!)

Please don't bother to answer this. I shall be so soon seeing you —

in another 10 days or so. I've never known such lovely weather. White trousers all day and two blankets at night. That's what I call '*climate*'!

Yours till a cinder,

J. A. Fisher

P.S. This is a delicious land! I said just now to the concierge, 'Has the post come?' His answer was, 'No, Signor, it is raining, so the letters will be late to-day'! I have had to send the book by parcel post.

208: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

October 4th, 1909

My dear First Lord,

. . . I was very delighted at your Balmoral visit, more especially as I happened to know it was absolutely spontaneous on the King's part to show His Majesty's appreciation of you being so splendid a fighter! He's a steadfast friend when once he has given his confidence. You will find the King will do you a good turn yet, especially if he lives the 20 years that Treves[1] swears he will!

I have had no end of advice piled on me, and really with earnestly good intentions, I firmly believe, but I must reply I am absolutely in your hands and mean it.

I can't imagine how it can be conceived that there will be a change of Government, as the Unionists can't win, and I can't believe the Prime Minister will ever move you from the Admiralty to Home Secretary or anything else, considering what an immense advantage it is to him to have the present all-pervading idea that you put the Navy first before all personal considerations, and have proved it by your actions so clearly to everyone in the Kingdom. First, over the Estimates, and then with regard to Beresford, when the Cabinet funked it, and you did it off your own bat and succeeded beyond all anticipations. Also at heart I believe Mr. Asquith is not a mean man to forsake one who helped him as you did at the Treasury and afterwards. All I know is that he said things to me of you on his return from Biarritz, on being made Prime Minister, which, if he

[1] Sir Frederick Treves, first Baronet, the brilliant surgeon to King Edward, later to King George V, who was to become a warm friend of Fisher's and one of his 'greatest benefactors' for having saved his life in 1917 (*Memories*, p. 249).

forsakes you now, would make him a despicable coward. If you remember, I saw him by appointment five minutes after his arrival at his house. All I really want personally is to pursue that course which makes things easiest for you, as I can never forget how you have stood by me.

Secret and Private. Beresford told a friend of mine lately that Haldane was the one man he relied on. Beresford is a liar, so there may be nothing in it.

Yours very truly, J. A. Fisher

P.S. I think the motto for the procedure of the Navy War Council (I am so glad you like the name!) should be '*solvitur ambulando*'. Let experience dictate what the procedure and arrangements should be. The point to guard against is a Board within a Board, and no diminishing of the direct personal responsibility to the First Lord of the First Sea Lord. I have no misgivings as to complete success.

209: TO MRS. REGINALD NEELD

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. October 10th, 1909]

Darling B.,

Thank you for your letter, which I was delighted to get and hear your good account of Mannheim. It's a wonderful place, I think, for heart, but as my heart has been examined by so many great doctors and pronounced all right, I've never been again, but prefer a 'liver' cure!

I had written to Mother to catch the post on my way up in the train, so you'll have heard of the finest weather I've ever experienced! White trousers and white shoes till the day before yesterday every day since I left England, and only 4 days with any rain at all! I've come back feeling most extraordinarily fit and well, but this awful English climate will soon bring me my usual cough and cold, which lasts till June always! How people who can get warmth and sunshine stop in England, when they can go abroad, utterly beats me!

I think Siena is the most beautiful place in the world. One can live quite comfortably there, wine included, on 5 francs a day, in the most perfect little house I ever saw — clean as a new pin, and the grapes and figs and pomegranates growing over one's head, which

you can pick without paying for! It's 1,300 feet above the sea, so the air is delicious and nothing but Turner sunsets (I am almost longing to retire at times to get the sun all the year round!) . . .

I am going to have fierce fighting at Admiralty, I expect, but I am quite ready for it, as I feel a giant refreshed. Of course, I am always living from hand to mouth, and though no one knows it, I have very often been on the verge of leaving the Admiralty during the whole of the last 5 years. I've had about enough of it now. I should have gone last year, except for the King. But keep this private.

Love to Mother and Reginald.

Your loving father, J. F.

210: TO ARNOLD WHITE

October 12th, 1909
4:40 a.m. My first thoughts!

Burn *this*!

My dear Arnold White,

You are the '*Bovril of Letters*'! (copyright in the United States of America!). I have just seen in *Referee* of week before last in *2* lines the *2,600* questions of the Beresford Enquiry and Beresford judged out of his own mouth![1] The whole ox is there! *Bless you!*

I only got back night before last. I am getting tons of kindly advice. I am invited to perform hara-kiri! I forgo the Christian rite of crucifixion! The French didn't kill Nelson when they shot him in the back; they immortalized him! For the sake of the greatest of all things — *Discipline* — I must remain at present and must be supported. Heaven be thanked, I've more ginger than even 20 years ago, and *Athanasius contra mundum* is my elixir of life! I am not going 'to lag superfluous on the stage'! I'm not such a d—d fool! I am going when I am asked to stop. That's Machiavelli! (Read *The Prince* by that wonderful man!)

Burn this letter the moment you have read it and say not a word of its contents, or I'll never speak to you again, for you would ruin my plans. . . .

Ever yours, J. A. Fisher

[1] Fisher may have had these lines in mind, by 'Vanoc' (that is, White) in the *Referee*, October 3rd, 1909: 'Had Lord Charles Beresford not belonged to an old family, does anyone imagine that he could with impunity to himself have written to the Prime Minister in April that everything was wrong in the Navy, and to *The Times* on Aug. 17 that everything was right?'

211: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

[ca. October 12th, 1909]

Secret

My dear First Lord,

The King fully concurs in all your ideas as to your humble servant, so I assume it may be all considered settled, contingent on the Prime Minister, of course. The King wishes me to go to Sandringham on Friday [October 15th][1] . . .

Now I have got a blow to give you. It was a blow to me anyhow this morning! Bridgeman told me wherever I went he was going. I said you counted on his remaining on with Fawkes, and so had I. But he said No, he wouldn't serve under either Fawkes or May. He had a contempt for both of them, but he would gladly remain as First Sea Lord with Callaghan as Second Sea Lord.[2] I said I was bound to tell you at once, and he agreed. He was awfully nice. Then I asked Madden[3] about it, and Madden said it had all come about in the last two days, Bridgeman's wish to be First Sea Lord, but he didn't know how. I went to see Lady Bridgeman to oil the machine — she was sweet but firm. I don't know why you should not have Bridgeman as First Sea Lord, especially with such an excellent man as Callaghan as Second. Bridgeman would carry more guns in the Navy than Fawkes by a long way, and a *persona gratissima* to the Tories, but the old couplet comes in here, and the First Lord is bound to have the man he loves!

'I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know and know quite well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell!'[4]

[1] This passage and what follows would suggest that Fisher's retirement had been pretty well settled. But on October 18th we find the Admiral writing to Esher: 'I had a lovely time at Sandringham and had a good time with the Prince of Wales also . . . It's wonderful I haven't gone under with such a lot of d—d intriguers knocking about! *I honestly believe* it's due to you and Knollys that I am safe!' And on October 20th, to Stead: 'I am not going until Elisha is right underneath, all expectant for the mantle dropping on him!'

[2] Admiral Sir Wilmot Fawkes was Commander-in-Chief at Plymouth, 1908-1911; Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet) Sir George Callaghan, Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1908-1910.

[3] Captain Madden was Naval Secretary to McKenna, 1908-1910.

[4] A translation of Martial (*Epigrams*, I, 32) in Thomas Brown's *Works* (1719). The usual version has 'love thee' for 'like you', and the third line reads: 'But this alone I know full well.'

Then Winsloe boarded me and asked me to mention his name to you for the Atlantic Fleet. I told him I could not say what your views were, but Neville was senior to him, and I had an idea you thought Neville better suited to the Atlantic Fleet than where he was, and I advised him to keep his heart set on China and ask you next April to let him go.[1] I considered I was doing Madden's dirty work in all this, and told Madden so, which he much enjoyed. But I doubt Winsloe doing this joyfully, and it's difficult for you to guarantee him China.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

212: FROM H. H. ASQUITH

10, Downing Street
Whitehall, S. W.
October 26th, 1909

Confidential

My dear Sir John,

I have the pleasure of formally proposing to you that, on the occasion of His Majesty's approaching birthday — November 9th — you should be raised to the peerage.

I am much gratified that it should fall to me to be the medium of communicating to you His Majesty's gracious intentions.

I desire, at the same time, to express to you the sincere and grateful acknowledgments of His Majesty's Government for the great work — unique in our time — which you have accomplished in developing and strengthening the Navy, and assuring the maritime supremacy of Great Britain.

I beg, with respect and esteem, to remain,

Yours very faithfully,

H. H. Asquith

[1] Vice-Admiral Sir Alfred Winsloe, the Fourth Sea Lord, became Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron in March 1910 (-1913), succeeding Lambton. Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir George Neville, commanding the 3rd and 4th Divisions of the Home Fleet, 1909-1911, and Bridgeman were rated by Fisher as 'our two best Admirals' (Fisher to Sir Arthur Davidson, March 23rd, 1907).

213: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

October 27th, 1909

Private and Secret

My beloved E.,

You will be expecting a letter from me, I think! Well! *the fat is well on the fire!* Asquith funked sending McKenna's masterly reply to Beresford's letter,[1] with the usual result of weakness that he finds himself in a worse hole! *The King is furious*, and rightly so. We have rewarded all Beresford's adherents instead of trampling on them, and this is the reward of condoning mutiny! also the reward of the milk and water report of the Beresford Committee! It's a pity you are not up here. I fancy McKenna is to be engineered into Herbert Gladstone's place,[2] who is going to succeed Selborne in South Africa. How far Haldane is pulling the strings as regards Beresford is uncertain. He certainly pulled them over the Committee's Report!

The King . . . came over to see my son at Kilverstone, which I fear gave umbrage, but it was sweet of him! I saw him last night, but he is helpless against Asquith if Asquith *won't* fight! Beresford is simply untiring in his intrigues. The Admiralty lies quiescent like a hippopotamus in the mud! . . . *Private.* Asquith told McKenna that he knew the other side would 'chuck' me if they came in! If true, where is gratitude? But how on earth could Asquith know this!

Yours,

J. F.

214: TO JAMES F. REMNANT

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 29th, 1909

My dear Remnant,

. . . Nothing would induce me to let you help me. I ruin every man and woman who does so. Look how I have injured Garvin. No. I am all right! I told the King I had led a dog's life, but yet every dog has had his day! Mine will come (but probably after I am dead!).

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

J. F.

[1] Beresford had published in the press (*The Times*, October 25th) his correspondence with the Prime Minister since April concerning the 'intimidation on the one hand and favouritism on the other for which the Admiralty have of late years been notorious'. He stressed the cases of Sturdee, Campbell, and Hulbert. McKenna's reply to the charges, in a letter to Asquith of October 27th, which the latter had published (*The Times*, November 1st), effectively demolished Beresford's loose charges. The same issue of *The Times* carried Beresford's rebuttal.

[2] Herbert J. (afterwards first Viscount) Gladstone, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 1905-1910.

215: TO FREDERICK E. G. PONSONBY

Admiralty, Whitehall
Private October 29th, 1909

My beloved Friend,

. . . I don't think one can look a gift horse in the mouth, but I've been urged to demur being a common and garden Peer like the man who makes linoleum or lends money for elections, and ask to be the same as a brewer, for instance like Viscount Iveagh, or the politicians who get made Viscounts, but I think best let alone and I expect you will agree, and you need not answer this letter either. Nor should I have written at all, but I want to rub in the enclosed if opportunity offers to let the King see it.[1]

Yours till death, J. F.

216: FROM KING EDWARD[2]

Newmarket
October 29th, 1909

My dear Fisher,

Many thanks for sending me the Prime Minister's letter to you of 26th inst. to read, which I return. It is a charming letter in every respect and one which I know you would wish to keep. I endorse every word in it and nobody deserves the thanks of your Sovereign and your Country more warmly than you do. Time will show what admirable Reforms you have created in the Royal Navy, and you can afford to treat with the contempt that it deserves 'those back biters' who have endeavoured to calumniate you! When you leave the high and important post which you now occupy in the Admiralty, I hope you will still render the best services that lie in your power for the good of the noble profession to which you belong, and I hope continue a member of the 'Defence Committee'! You possess too much vitality to 'lie fallow'!

Ever, Yours very sincerely and gratefully,

Edward R & I.

[1] On October 31st, Fisher wrote Ponsonby again: 'Don't do any more, please. Just got your letter. I don't want you to bother. The "candlestick maker" argument is so to the point that I am content to be one of the "bait" that lures the linoleum man to help his country.'

[2] This is very likely the letter which Fisher referred to later as 'the letter the King wrote me on being made a Peer – the very best letter I ever received in my life' (note of February 14th, 1911, on the envelope containing the King's letters).

Most Confidential. I trust that Board of Admiralty will consider most seriously C. B.'s outrageous conduct, which if tolerated undermines all discipline in the R.N. I trust (to use your own words) 'serious action' will be taken!

E. R.

217: TO FREDERICK E. G. PONSONBY [Viscount Knollys?]

November 3rd, 1909

My dear Friend,

I am very anxious to see you for a few minutes as to the King seeing Sir Arthur Wilson when His Majesty goes to Sandringham. Wilson lives at Swaffham, only 9 or 10 miles off, I think. McKenna tells me that the King was graciously pleased to say that His Majesty would see Wilson and get him *fixed* to be First Sea Lord, so that McKenna's communication to Wilson hereafter would be purely formal. The reason for urgency is that, as 3 or 4 persons now know about Wilson, it will probably leak out and Wilson would be got at and persuaded he was keeping the bread out of some one else's mouth, etc. This was done before when we wanted Wilson as Head of the Naval War College, and the Beresford object is to get Sir Arthur Moore[1] as my successor as embodying hostility to all that has been done.

McKenna's letter proved Beresford a mutineer and a liar, but Beresford simply restates his lies and reiterates his mutiny. He ought to be put on the Retired List. A Bluejacket who falsely accused his Captain would get two years' hard labour! And any officer would be dismissed the Service as was Admiral Vernon, who was Beresford's prototype.[2] Of course there is the danger of making Beresford a martyr and the scandal of his bringing a civil action against the Admiralty, which would advertise him more than ever. . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

[1] Vice-Admiral Moore was not holding an appointment at this time.

[2] Admiral Edward Vernon ('Old Grog'), bitterly critical of the state of the Navy and of the treatment he was getting from the Admiralty, was superseded in his command (1745) and soon after (1746) struck off the list of flag officers.

218: TO ARNOLD WHITE

November 13th, 1909

Strictly Private
My beloved Friend,

Have no fear about Wilson. He assured McKenna the other day he was fully satisfied as to Admiralty policy in regard to Dreadnoughts, and that we had acted most wisely in keeping back when German building permitted it, so as to thereby get *far more powerful ships*, and what was proposed for next year fully met his views, and that utter rot was talked as to our want of Dreadnoughts. *Burn this letter also, please, and don't quote.* But I write just to set your mind at rest! *Do you know that the ships we have just laid down are as* [*far*] *beyond the Dreadnought as the Dreadnought was beyond all before her!* And they will say again, 'D—n that blackguard! Again a new era of Dreadnoughts!' But imagine the German 'wake-up' when these new ships by and by burst on them! *70,000 horsepower!!! and guns that will gut them!!!* Oh my! that I was born too soon!

Yours for ever,

F.

Beresford gave out two days' ago he was PROMISED to be First Lord of the Admiralty 'to KEEP WILSON RIGHT'!!!! and he was sure of Portsmouth and of change of Government.

P.S. A dear friend came to see me yesterday and said the work done in the last 5 years was so vast in every portion of the Navy, and all done so at once and together, that the mind failed to grasp it all! *It's really true!* but I have not done it. It was the splendid band who worked with me. 'I have culled a garland of flowers, mine only the string that binds them' (Montaigne). But all the same, as my friend said, 'Never was baser ingratitude shown to anyone' than to me by *both* political parties! 'and they send you away with the pension of a chaplain or a cross'. But I don't mind; after all, the *mens conscia recti* counts!

But the lovely thing of all, my dear Friend, is the fact that what I did in the years before of my life far transcends what done in the last 5 years, but no one knows it.[1] Too much fighting for writing.

[1] On the same theme: '. . . all you read and all people hear of is the last 5 years, which is just a flea bite to all that went before, but alas! all that is only a memory! I built castles in the air in those young days and ever since have been rearing the foundations to meet them in the skies' (Fisher to Esther Hallam Meynell, January 16th, 1910). See below, p. 292.

But I never meant to write all this. Even Mahan wrote a private letter of wonderment!

Last night I had sent me an extract from Haldane's speech at the Eighty Club in 1905.[1] Please return. And yet this man persuaded Asquith to alter the Beresford Report into a d—d milk and water fizzle, instead of pulverizing Beresford out of existence, as first drafted! But it has come back like a boomerang, and Beresford floated the Navy Scare, which will cost the Radicals the Election. Serves them d—d well right! I beg you, burn all this! . . .

219: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

November 14th, 1909

Dear Mrs. McKenna,

I think you would like to hear what a Lord feels like when being hatched! It's your husband's egg, you know! and you ought to take an interest in the incubator! But first of all the surprise of my life has been literally the 'masses' of telegrams and letters from all sorts and conditions of men, but more especially in the Navy itself! I thought I was alone in the world. Not that I minded, except that at times one felt a bit desolate and deserted. (Even Elijah did that, you know! and then he saw all those chariots and Angels, etc.) And Stead wrote round and reminded me of Nebuchadnezzar, in case I got proud, which was very friendly of him, don't you think?

Napoleon B. [Haldane] is hard at it. He wants to direct all the defensive forces of the crown, or rather he wants them directed by one man. '*Ecce homo!*'

Garter King at Arms has been at my bedside and wants to discard the ancient Fisher arms, or, as he puts it, 'having carved out your own career, carve out your own coat of arms'. Some wag has sent me Beresford and Custance standing on their heads upside down as supporters. It wouldn't do to take 'Dreadnought' as motto, but how would 'Fear God and fear nothing else' do?[2] Comes to the same

[1] Haldane, speaking at the Eighty Club on January 17th, 1905, had praised Fisher for cutting off 'useless burdens' and for a policy of naval concentration that 'served the interests of the whole Empire and was not locally apportioned with weakening results . . . He wished they could get another Sir John Fisher for the Army with a policy of thinking'.

[2] '. . . which is a paraphrase of "Dreadnought" and Psalm 34, verse 9, and Tate and Brady's hymn, "Through all the changing scenes of life".' He thought 'Dreadnought' alone 'too arrogant and boastful!' (Fisher to Beatrix Neeld, November 14th, 1909). The final choice: 'Dread Nought is over 80 times in the Bible ("Fear Not"). So I took as my motto [for the peerage coat of arms] "Fear God and Dread Nought" ' (*Memories*, p. 276). He fully lived up to it. It was not long afterwards that he wrote: 'Do right – and fear no man; don't write – and fear no woman!'

thing! Got to get a 'mailed fist' in somewhere for the German Emperor. It might hold a trident as the crest, and two sheet anchors might be the supporters — sailors with their arms round them. . . .

I got an extraordinary affectionate letter from Harcourt — please keep private as I think he meant it so — and a saponaceous one from Napoleon B.

Don't worry to answer. This is only a *jeu d'esprit*!

Yours,

J. F.

220: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

November 16th, 1909

Dear Mrs. McKenna,

Politics! There ought to be no contest at Portsmouth before the General Election.[1] The writ ought to be postponed on the plain ground that the by-election, so far from being fought on Tariff Reform, as desired by the Opposition, or on the Budget, as desired by the Government, would be a campaign against the discipline of the Navy. From the point of view of the public interest, nothing could be more disastrous. It is the apotheosis of insubordination! Beresford will win now when perhaps he wouldn't win at the General Election. Anyhow, you ought to prevail on your friend Mr. Pease,[2] or whoever runs the Elections, to defer the writ. N. B. It will be awkward if the communications between Beresford and Lloyd George and Winston at the time of the Navy Estimates get public! Beresford said there were enough Dreadnoughts. Lloyd George said the sooner Beresford was First Sea Lord the better! Wouldn't these items startle?

I've given Macnamara a leaflet of the Navy League showing what has been done for the Warrant Officers and Bluejackets and Dockyardmen in the last three years! It won't be a bad election leaflet!

Why don't you write a novel! I only say this because of your letter this morning. Would you like to have it back to see how well it is written?

[1] 'If they have a by-election at Portsmouth, it will be a great mistake even were Beresford to be beaten, as it gives him what he is pining for: 1st – limelight, 2nd – political obligation would force Balfour and Cawdor into his arms' (Fisher to Esher, November 24th, 1909). There was no by-election at Portsmouth. In the general elections of January and December 1910 Beresford won, and held the seat until 1916, when he was raised to the peerage.

[2] J. A. Pease, the Chief Liberal Whip.

Do you know Mrs. Tree?[1] She always has very low frocks, nor is she a finished actress. Why is Mrs. Tree like a bad photograph? Because she is undeveloped and over-exposed. Why is a ghost like a bun? Because they are both fancy bred! I forgot if I gave you the recipe for coffee. Coffee should be

'Schwart wie der Teufel
Heis wie die Helle
Süss wie die Liebe.'

Isn't 'Dreadnought' too egotistical? Perhaps in two words, 'Dread Nought'!

I have had a very nice letter from Miss Barbara[2] and a splendid book from your mother. I think I am getting on very well with your family! 'Kindred spirits'!

I wish I was on the Equator. I hate this cold and no sun and wet! I believe '*Toujours à toi*' means something nice.

J. F.

Get the Portsmouth election deferred!

221: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

November 20th, 1909

My dear First Lord,

I think it would be a good thing if I wrote to Bridgeman and said as follows:

> I had a conversation with the First Lord yesterday about the Estimates, and he has arranged for a Supplementary Estimate of nearly ¾ of a million in respect of the four additional Dreadnoughts. This will be a splendid refutation of Beresford's electioneering statement at Portsmouth that they are phantom ships and that they are the ships of next year's Estimates. This Supplementary Estimate will effectually stop all such electioneering charges against the Admiralty. In continuation of the First Lord's arrangement with you as to the numbers being recruited to 129,000 by April 1st next, he assents to the 1,200

[1] Mrs. Beerbohm Tree, the actress.
[2] Barbara Jekyll, Pamela McKenna's elder sister.

additional men, which he can defend before the Cabinet as due to increase of complement. That makes the total *130,200*, or an increase of over two thousand men on present year's Estimates, which it must be admitted is a very considerable increase, if you recognize that we stand about 3 to 1 nearly, or certainly 2 to 1, in regard to the German personnel as compared with our 'long service', and consequently far more efficient personnel. If you were to admit to the contrary, then our long-service system is doomed because of its far greater expense. All those trade protection cruisers are *not* required, on Sir A. Wilson's theory of the war, in the same immediate way as the rest of the Fleet, and on that really hangs the numbers. You may get out any number of theories as to war requirements, but the ultimate result is always this: what is the total the Germans can put afloat in fully manned vessels? What is the total of fully manned vessels our 130,200 men can put afloat at once in a few hours? Is our superiority sufficient, say 3 to 1, for any conceivable plan of war? I think that is the broad way of looking at the personnel question. More rot is talked about war plans than any other subject on earth except the abolition of the House of Lords!

The First Lord has got the toughest job possible with his colleagues to get an increment of five millions sterling. The Navy Estimates at 40 millions with a Supplementary Estimate of ¾ of a million are huge figures.

I think I might leave off there to Bridgeman, but it may be you will think it best to leave him alone till we meet in discussion.

I feel rather guilty going off to Norfolk to-day, as I am feeling so absolutely well and energetic, but I suppose I had better do what the doctor tells me is indispensable; but I will come back any moment if you telegraph. I would like very much to hear of Wilson's answer when you get it. My address is Kilverstone Hall, Thetford, Norfolk.[1] I assume you will have an early interview with Wilson and tell him whom you propose as the new Board, but not invite him to suggest any alteration — it would only be any strong objection he might have to any of those named. I still cling to Madden as Controller, and Jellicoe is in full accord. Briggs, the only [other] possible, is not to be compared with Madden and would be nowhere for months! simply an automaton signing papers! Besides, I don't

[1] Kilverstone Hall, 'an aboriginal house, A.D. 1400, and your head touches the ceiling!' (it was rebuilt before World War I), was the home of his son.

see how you are going to get rid of Winsloe so early as January, so the Fourth Sea Lord would not be vacant for Madden.[1]

I can't believe in the defeat of the Government, so look forward to your continuance at the Admiralty. I earnestly hope it may be so. It will be a deep grief leaving you in January — so few weeks off now — but it's undoubtedly the safe course for you to nominate the new Board next week, if you can. However, you first arrange about Curzon going to Portsmouth, as all is consequent on that, and it would not be premature to ask him now.[2] Please let me know about my writing to Bridgeman, as Jellicoe tells me he was fuming two days ago when he saw him.[3]

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

222: FROM VICE-ADMIRAL SIR FRANCIS BRIDGEMAN

Copgrove Hall
Via Leeds
November 21st, 1909

My dear Sir John,

The announcement of Wilson's acceptance of your post produces mixed feelings within me: I hate your going! and I feel as if I had no further interest in continuing to serve! I dare say that *under the circumstances* Wilson is the best solution, but I know from experience with him that there is no joy to be found in serving either with him or under him! Deadly dull! and uncompromising, as you know. He will never consult any one and is impatient in argument, even to being impossible! Of course I shall be delighted to remain where I am up to the time of the change, but I could *not promise* anything more.

Just off to hunt the fox, so please excuse more.

Yours sincerely,

F. B. Bridgeman

[1] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Charles J. Briggs, Rear-Admiral in the 1st Division of the Home Fleet, 1909, became the new Third Sea Lord and Controller, in succession to Jellicoe, in December 1910 (-1912); Madden succeeded Winsloe as Fourth Sea Lord in January 1910 (-1911).

[2] Curzon-Howe became Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth in April 1910 (-1911).

[3] 'With one exception I think your suggested observations to Bridgeman quite first rate', McKenna replied on November 21st. The exception was this: McKenna had agreed to an increase in personnel of 1,200, not 2,200, over the 128,000 in the current estimates. That made the total 129,200.

223: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
Thetford, Norfolk
November 23rd, 1909

My dear First Lord,

First of all let me say how deeply touched I am by your last words in your letter from Windsor Castle as to our so parting company.[1] It is indeed sad, but it clinches Wilson and your new Board. I would have dearly liked to have been with you to the end. Also it would have been more effective as regards the Navy had I remained till April 30th, but there's a Providence that shapes our life rough hew it as we may! . . .

After reading your letter about the personnel, I won't write to Bridgeman at all, more especially as he has sent me another fire-eating letter. He had best cool down.

I enclose a letter from Greene.[2] I've told him to ask your instructions. I should certainly not permit the meeting, if I were you, in my absence. I think of Frankenstein in regard to this Navy War Council! . . .

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

224: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 14th, 1909

You had better burn this!

Secret

My beloved E.,

I think you will well understand how I am now overwhelmed in view of my being off to Norfolk for good this day 5 weeks! I am appalled at what I have to get through!

I think Wilson is getting hold of all things. He don't like it! Private. Already they are beginning to find out they have got King Stork for King Log! (I've served out *Aesop's Fables* to McKenna and

[1] 'You have been so good to me, so understanding of my difficulties, so skilful in teaching me, so brave in your support in my political anxieties, so affectionate in your personal relations, that I have neither heart nor wish to go on without you' (McKenna to Fisher, November 21st, 1909).

[2] W. (afterwards Sir W.) Graham Greene, Assistant Secretary of the Admiralty, 1907-1911, later Permanent Secretary, 1911-1917.

Bridgeman!) Well! Ottley saw me about your Technical Committee and I gave it *con amore* to McKenna, *who is warmly with you*, but kindly never let this out, as I am absolutely sure that he is right to express no opinion till Wilson joins him. I have no idea of Wilson's line on it. No one will get round him![1]

McKenna's sole object in life is to hang on to me. *That can't be!* That's why I deliberately go and live in Norfolk, though it would suit me better to be in London. (I shall take a room at the Carlton Hotel, as I like it, whenever I do come up. Who is the head man to go to about a quiet room?) Some M. P. told me he had an excellent room and breakfast for 10 shillings a day at the Carlton. I very nearly said to old Probyn[2] yesterday (when talking to him) about the King giving me rooms somewhere, but I refrained. I think it had best come spontaneous.

I think the King told Cassel[3] to ask me to dinner next Sunday, and Ponsonby wrote and told me what to wear! What a man the King is! The elephant's trunk picking up a pin one moment and the next rooting up an oak!

Yours till death,

J. F.

225: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

December 17th, 1909
4 a.m.!

My dear First Lord,

I now have all the feelings of King Darius when sleep went from his eyes and you in the Lions' Den! (and probably like Daniel sleeping peacefully, not caring a d—n for the lions!) — but I have the conviction it's the worst crisis the Navy has had, because of a big

[1] Esher was 'trying to get a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to sit weekly and work out the details of decisions already settled by the full committee. This work is most essential, as the ability to carry out suddenly the settled plans of the executive Government, based upon the Committee of Imperial Defence reports, depends upon the details being understood and jointly worked out by the Navy and Admiralty. Haldane . . . and the W.O. warmly approve. So does E. Grey – so does Asquith. So *did* McKenna. But Wilson . . . has objected and cannot see that the Committee of Imperial Defence has anything to do with the general planning of naval and military operations in certain contingencies. He maintains that these are matters which should be left to the C. of General Staff and the 1st Sea Lord to discuss and arrange between themselves. This of course is putting the clock back some years' (Esher to Balfour, December 24th, 1909; *Esher*, II, 428).

[2] General (ret.) Sir Dighton Probyn, Keeper of His Majesty's Privy Purse, 1901-1910.

[3] Sir Ernest Cassel, the banker, and possibly King Edward's greatest friend.

majority and so Lloyd George an avalanche! I see the magnificence of your position — '*Admiralty or Nothing*'! I see its risk because the Prime Minister no fighter! — then the Triumvirate is Satanic in its attributes![1] Haldane escaping from the Territorial Hell as an Angel of Light for the Admiralty Heaven! The *one* man 'to co-ordinate and weld into one Imperial whole the defensive forces of the Empire'! (N. B. the Army on the beach! — like Rosebery in the gutter!) And you kindly deposited on the beach with the Army! Napoleonic [*sic*] B. [Bonaparte] Haldane! and the Cabinet I suppose will be like a flock of sheep! I shan't be there to resign with you, but all the rest will, but I can resign the Defence Committee, which I am not sure won't be a bigger bomb when I explain the reasons in the House of Lords in the speech you write out for me! I think Haldane will get back into Hell!

In the meantime absolute reticence seems desirable to get Wilson safely installed on January 25. If I were you I would precipitate that date, and you have a consummate reason — Winsloe going to China, and you don't want two patents, so have it earlier to get him away earlier than January 27 — his date of sailing if New Board postponed. It is essential not to alarm Wilson, and get him on the Board before the cataclysm! But is it right for you to ruin your political future, having so splendid a start, and as the Prime Minister will say, obstinately refusing to be a Secretary of State!

Ever yours,

Fisher

P.S. It makes a good picture! You resigning in the Cabinet — Wilson at the Board of Admiralty — I in the House of Lords! Then your fireworks in the House of Commons! A salvo of ten million rockets! But we are babes in the wood in cunning as compared with those three! Won't they win?

[1] 'They will turn McKenna out of the Cabinet because he got the EIGHT!!! Don't mention this, but McKenna himself has told me last Sunday that Lloyd George, Winston, and Haldane (the new Trinity) are bent on kicking him out, supposing they come in again, *which I don't think they will!*' (Fisher to Goulding, January 15th, 1910). McKenna would be a 'real loss to the Navy. The sacred fire of efficiency burns brightly in him! and he's a born fighter and a good hater, which I love (as Dr. Johnson did) with all my heart!' (Fisher to Esher, February 18th, 1910).

226: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 25th, 1909

Private
My beloved E.,

. . . As promised, I spoke to him [A. K. Wilson] about your sub-committee, and he said, as I expected, he would like to wait a bit. We have talked a lot about our War Plan for the Navy. You know he told the Defence Committee that only he and I knew of the War Plan, which is quite true, and it was the same when his Fleet was joined up with mine when South African War [was] in progress. He would sooner die than disclose it. I suggest to you to withhold your judgment. . . .

Yours,

F.

227: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Christmas Day, 1909

Dear K. S. [Kindred Spirit],

(You must find out what that means!) I love your present! Isn't it extraordinary that I have been all over London trying to get one and all sold out! Depend upon it, there's some bond between us!

The King has sent me a lovely silver model of a submarine (he thinks I'm mad on them!), and the Queen a Dutch ship in full sail on an old silver ladle, and Princess Victoria writes I must be 'good and loveable at the same time'! (I told her Mary Magdalene had seven devils, and yet the most highly spoken of person in the Scriptures!) *But I value your present just as much!*

My Christmas thought to you is 'Let the sun dial be your guide! Register only sunshine hours! Let the rest be oblivion!' (Copyright in England and the United States.)

Yours till a cinder,

F.

If the slippers don't fit or you prefer another colour, I can change them. I raided one of your shoes, so they ought to fit, but maybe off colour!

A NAVY SCARE...1909-1910

228: FROM REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 25th, 1909

My dear Lord,

All the good wishes of the day be with you. I have been settling my accounts with the year and going over in my mind many tough and victorious fights in which we have been comrades. I think our most powerful weapon has been our perfect unanimity. It means so much to have absolute confidence that you will not be left in the lurch, and for my part I have never had the smallest hesitation or doubt. I recall with feelings of the most affectionate friendship how firmly you stood by me in my Cabinet troubles. The victory was due to you, and I owe it to myself to testify how ready you have always been for the sake of the immediate duty to fling away office and all its rewards. The political future has no alarms for me, for I have no desire to remain at the Admiralty without you. . . .

Yours as ever,

Reginald McKenna

229: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

January 8th, 1910
4 a.m.! The early worm!

My dear K. S.,

(Is it 'Kindred Spirit' or 'Kindly Soul'?) Of course I was disappointed when your nice effective maid brought your note![1] I sent back an insolent message by her, and she understands a joke! She would suit me for my last days, as I am going to have a good maid for my declining years. (Please don't think of David's old age!) *Mind I ask you a question about a lady friend of yours I have met lately.* I will come any time to-day between 12:30 and midnight to suit your sweet convenience. . . .

Great joke yesterday. Wrote to the King — forgot I was a Lord, put 'Sir John Fisher' and had my letter returned! . . .

I presume you are overdoing yourself, going out to lunch, etc., etc.! Where is your dear mother? If I had charge of you, I would be a

[1] Mrs. McKenna had, on the 7th, cancelled Fisher's proposed visit that evening. She was confined to home, as she was expecting a baby. McKenna was off electioneering. Michael McKenna was born on January 31st, and Fisher and Asquith were his godfathers.

dragon! Besides, I want you to dine (a select party) at the Carlton Restaurant the end of February — Knollys, Esher, Soveral, First Lord, self, yourself, and four select ladies without husbands, mostly widows — so DO take care of yourself!

Yours till Hell freezes,

F.

I am going to lunch with the King on Sunday, so I am all right.

230: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 11th, 1910

Private

My dear Arnold White,

Just this moment got your kind letter, and I will speak to Crease, who, however, will certainly dissuade you from writing, as Beresford and his gang will only throw mud at you and call you 'the infamous Admiralty Press Bureau,' etc. (What stories one might tell of Beresford!) . . .

Asquith has only himself to thank if the Tories come in on the Navy like the Radicals on the Chinese,[1] as he did not stamp on Lloyd George, but sacrificed McKenna, or tried to. But what a trio to engineer a scare! A discredited Socialist, a shady company promoter, and a blatant Admiral.[2] What a Trinity!

I honestly believe that even *you* don't take in all that has happened in the last 5 years. Ottley (who's a genius and an orator!) lifted me up last night by a sudden outpouring of the spirit! But it's all the talent of the marvellous Board who worked with me, for I can truly say with Montaigne:

> 'I've culled a garland of flowers,
> Mine only is the string that binds them.'

[1] The reference is to the effective Radical election cry in 1905 that cheap yellow labour was being imported into the Rand. '"*The Navy in danger*"!! How the Beresford Report is coming home to roost! The Navy Lie is going to win! Balfour has bolstered up Beresford and thanks God tariff reform not the cry' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, January 13th, 1910). In the election (January 14th-28th) the Liberals won 275 seats (they had had 373), the Conservatives, 273 (168). The Government's majority (including Labour and Irish Nationalists) dropped from 334 to 124. McKenna and six other Cabinet Ministers suffered decreases in their majorities.

[2] Apparently Beresford, Robert Blatchford, founder and Editor of the Socialist weekly, *Clarion*, 1891-1927, who had taken up the Tory cry of 'protection and conscription', and H. H. Mulliner, Chairman of the Coventry Ordnance Company until mid-1909, whose alarmist disclosures regarding the expansion of German naval construction facilities had stoked the 1909 scare and who was active in the election campaign.

It's a pity you don't know Ottley. He was born for 'listening Senates to command.'[1]

Ever yours, F.

Just now to lie boldly is everything! I expect something big from Beresford.

A man is not known till he dies! It's the early part of my life the most strenuous and the best.

231: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 13th, 1910

My dear First Lord,

Mrs. Pamela tells me to-day all is going well with you, which rejoices me. The enclosed from Yexley will amuse you about Beresford.[2]

Bridgeman says this morning that Curzon may not accept Portsmouth, so he hears. I suggest the best plan for the King (before you offer it to Curzon) to express privately his wish to Curzon to accept when you offer it to him *à la* Wilson! as it would throw everything out frightfully were Curzon to refuse! You could not then possibly get Jellicoe afloat! If it would save you trouble when the time comes, I could write to the King.

Wilson asked if he could go for a walk with me this morning, and of course I assented, and we had a good time. I think you will find him all right — *he was very cordial towards you.* He then asked me to go over the new house with him, which I did. The fact is I see plainly you won't regret me!

Sandars (Balfour's Secretary) *yesterday* told a friend of mine they were assured of victory!

Ever yours,

Fisher

[1] 'While listening senates hang upon thy tongue' – James Thomson: 'The Seasons, Autumn' (1730).

[2] Yexley had written on January 12th: 'I have been asked by Warrant Officers, Chief and 1st Class Petty Officers, if I would convey to you their very grateful thanks for all you have done for the lower deck . . .' Yexley then reported that he had been appealed to by one of Beresford's partisans to support Beresford in his fight for Portsmouth; 'and then I am told that if the Conservatives are returned, he (Beresford) has been promised that he should be First Lord "to look after Wilson".' Fisher's reply follows (No. 232).

232: TO LIONEL YEXLEY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 13th, 1910

Private and Confidential
My dear Yexley,

Thank you so much for your letter. Will you please tell those whose message you give me how greatly I appreciate it and that they may rely on my continued efforts on their behalf. Unfortunately for them my departure has been precipitated by political events (the Lords threw out *their* Budget also!), and I can't expect my successors to have quite the same enthusiasm as I sincerely felt on their behalf. The Lower Deck richly deserves all we can do, because of splendid loyalty and unequalled efficiency amongst all the Navies of the world. Not only that, but our Warrant Officers and Petty Officers are competent for much higher positions than they now occupy, and for the good of the Service their status must be raised. *I have left a memorandum on this subject.* I mark my letter private as I don't wish to give forth a manifesto. It would only damage those I wish to serve, but I hope they will be aware of my sentiments. I can appeal to the past by deeds not words!

I hope you'll fight the good fight at Portsmouth and get Ananias carried out dead, as the result of the Election! What a 'show-up' your letter contains! I've no doubt you know best what to do.

Yours truly,

F.

233: TO ARNOLD WHITE

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S. W.
January 19th, 1910

Private
My good and faithful Friend,

. . . *Secret.* We shall be 2 keels to 1 in March 1912, and 2 keels to 1 at the end of the German Navy Law. We are much more than 2 keels to 1 now. We have *ample* personnel. We are going to have Estimates exceeding 40 millions by a good bit. We shall have *22* Dreadnoughts in March 1912, and the Germans will only have *11*! THIS ALL ABSOLUTE FACT! But as I've often told you, '*the truth is we don't want anyone to know the truth*', for suppose I said all this! Why,

Lloyd George & Co. would irresistibly cut down the Navy Estimates. Moreover, I am a real asset with the Little Navy Party! They look on me as a heavenly cheese-parer! *I am content to be vilified if my Country wins by it!* I have had long talks with Wilson. He is absolutely assured of our unassailable supremacy.

Burn this letter, please. I will write more to-morrow. Now I am pressed packing.

Yours,

F.

234: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL[1]

January 18th, 1910

Dear Mrs. Meynell,

. . . *I have enjoyed your letters.* I expect it will end in your being bored into being my biographer! What a lapse it would be for you after Pepys!

I've had a sad day. I've parted from my moorings this morning and the Admiralty knows me no more!

Lord Esher last night and Arnold White this morning (he has a great spirit!) both girding at me to speak and blast my enemies. *I will not.* It might be a great personal triumph, but the Navy would be shown so strong as to give good cause for Lloyd George & Co. to build fewer ships. So I welcome hate and odium like the early Christians did the lions — they knew the end was good! I can't say it's pleasant! I overheard myself being called sweet names in my Club to-day, but I fixed my face like a flint!

I don't quite know why I have suddenly poured out all this! I think it's the depressing day, perhaps!

Yours,

F.

[1] Esther Hallam Meynell, who wrote under her maiden name, E. Hallam Moorhouse, and whose early writing was almost entirely on British naval history – e.g., *Nelson and the Twentieth Century*, with Arnold White (1905), and *Samuel Pepys: Administrator, Observer, Gossip* (1909). She had met the Admiral in 1909. 'He adored Nelson, and I had written a book about him, and I think he found it amusing to discover a young woman who knew something about naval history' (Meynell: *A Woman Talking*, p. 67).

235: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

January 20th, 1910

Dear Mrs. Meynell,

I have this moment got your sweet letter. Impulse is all with me and I answer on the moment! (Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh!) Myself I hate a calculated letter or a prepared speech. You can go round the corner and get Buggins or Stiggins to do either for you!

Now I'll tell you a secret! A woman could write my life far better than a man because of the sympathy she has and what no man possesses in the peculiar degree to understand Pascal when he says, in Chapter XIX of his *Pensées*,

> '*Le cœur a ses raisons*
> *que la raison ne connaît point.*'

And whatever success I have had is more attributable to the action of imagination than to the dictates of cold reason. Ruskin was great there and encouraged the building of castles in the air and then the rearing up of the earthly foundations to meet them in the skies. When I first saw you at Garvin's, I instinctively felt you were the woman, but you would want a masculine preamble and finis. Garvin the first and Arnold White the second! Your competency unquestionable, but those two with you would make such a Trinity as no man had to avenge his life!

Now all this is a pure castle in the air! You are too fragile for such a task. Far too big a labour, and, besides all, *is it wise even to think of such a thing?* '*Facta non verba.*' Is it not best to let facts write one's life? All the same,

Yours most admiringly,

Fisher

236: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

January 22nd, 1910

Dear Mrs. Meynell,

No doubt you are right! Let no one else have a finger in the pie! *All right!* But let us think over the matter before we decide to lay the heavy burden on your fragile shoulders! Curiously enough, yesterday a very close friend of mine (whom you shall meet some

day) said to me, 'Mind! No one else can ever write anything about you but yourself.' Meaning there are things that only one's own heart can give forth and in one's own 'self words'. I think the happy thing would be for me, when I have leisure, to write down all I can whenever I feel the inspiration of the moment. Then you can thread the beads together and insert your diamonds between the common beads to give the lustre!

Yours ever, F.

237: FROM JULIAN S. CORBETT

Woodgate
Danehill, Sussex
January 25th, 1910

Dear Lord Fisher,

Being plunged in the thick of my brother's contest to retain his seat here — in the face of the débâcle — I had forgotten you were striking your flag to-day. But I can't help hereby taking off my hat to it. What a glorious command it has been! No one, I think, has ever had such a five years. Historians in the coming time will bring up against it, as they do now at Trafalgar. It will mark an epoch as clearly and indisputably as Nelson did his. There are not many of whom it can be said, 'He realised his epoch,' and that is what you have done. You have shown men what they were trying to do and shown them how to do it. The great art of war has made a stride that can never be retraced, and it is your work. To me it is a source of intense pride to have been associated with it, even as modestly as I have. To have helped to make a bit of history is worth much writing of it. For half a century at least, and probably more, they will be able to say of you: '*Si monumentum requaeris, circumspice*',[1] and your monument will cover the face of the seas and tell the world that England is still in front. What a glorious work! Thank you for all it means to me and to my —— [?] pride.[2]

Your devoted follower,

Julian Corbett

[1] 'If you seek his monument, look around you': Sir Christopher Wren's epitaph in St. Paul's Cathedral.

[2] Fisher replied on January 27th: 'You have given me great pleasure by your blessed letter, and so kind of you to write when so busy! . . . I shall ever treasure your great help to me in time of need, and your *Nineteenth Century* article never leaves my heart. It came at a critical moment and helped me over the stile!'

PART TWO

INTERREGNUM, 1910-1914

CHAPTER I

THE McKENNA PERIOD, 1910-1911[1]

FISHER'S resignation took effect on his sixty-ninth birthday, January 25th, 1910. He was to remain on the active list for another twelve months, and he would continue to be a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence (on November 30th he had been asked by the Prime Minister, possibly on the King's initiative, to stay on). McKenna had tried to cushion the blow by holding out hope for the future.

> McKenna asked me if he could come for a walk with me on Sunday night. As he left me he said, 'You will be First Sea Lord again in a year and bigger than ever, and Wilson sent to supersede May!! This means war! . . . It won't come off because there won't be war' (Fisher to White, January 12th, 1910).

His active career presumably was ended. Late in October 1909 he had toyed with the idea (encouraged by Ponsonby) of obtaining the Viceroyalty in India, if only 'to checkmate that Arch-Jesuit Haldane!' However, he yearned for a period of ease. To Esher (February 2nd, 1910) he confided his 'relief to be free of having to run the British Navy all over the world. It makes one think of St. Paul! "And besides all this, there came upon me daily the care of all the churches".'

He retired to his son's home, Kilverstone Hall, in Norfolk. He was very happy there. 'I've never known till now what joy there is in Nature. Even beauteous woman fades in the comparison!' He would speak of the sundial in the garden as 'only registering sunshine hours! The rest oblivion! I think that's nice for a rule of life'. He began to put his papers in order with a view to preparing his 'Reminiscences'.

> There is [he wrote White, April 6th, 1911] a great temptation to publish '*here and now*' (as the Salvationists say!). *How it would*

[1] On the whole interregnum period, 1910-1914, see *Records*, pp. 181-6, 189-202; *Memories*, pp. 221-4; Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 119-59; Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 76-9, 104-7, 121-42, *passim*, 170-1; *Esher*, III, *passim*.

make a lot of despicable villains 'sit up'! As I think I told you, I want no flatulent panegyrist to make me out a plaster saint, nor a boudoir pimp like Bellairs to represent me with forked tail and horns.

In January 1911, 'three publishers of repute' offered him any terms he cared to name for his life. He refused. 'Only a fool writes his own life.' Yet that was what he was doing, although Pamela McKenna, Esther Meynell, and others pleaded for the privilege of writing his life. Nor was he tempted by attractive offers from the world of business. 'Yesterday I had a deputation of millionaires offering me terms beyond the dreams of avarice, but I refused. I prefer to be as I am, though poor. It's the third offer since I left' (Fisher to Alan H. Burgoyne, October 29th, 1910).

His interest in politics was never keener. Especially did he follow every move in the heated constitutional struggle of 1910-1911 over the House of Lords. The Parliament Bill, which would virtually strip the Lords of their veto power, was passed by the House of Commons in May 1910 and again in May 1911. It finally passed the House of Lords in August 1911 after Asquith threatened to have the King create enough new peers to carry the bill. Fisher did not conceal his sympathies, as when writing Esher on April 25th, 1910, he spoke of 'the intolerable tyranny of the permanent Tory majority in the Lords that has meant a real single-chamber government for so many years'.

In November 1910 he crossed the Atlantic to attend the wedding of his son. He had long since got over his hostile feelings towards Americans and things American. As First Sea Lord he had never for a moment contemplated the possibility of an Anglo-American war. On the contrary, at least as early as April 1909 he was talking about 'that great scheme of an "English-speaking Federation", which is the only reply to Teutonic domination'. His whirlwind visit (New York, Philadelphia, November 20th-26th) was his first to the United States — and his last. He was tremendously impressed with what he saw — the 'hustle', the new Pennsylvania Station in New York, and much else, but above all with the fact that 'they are all English-speaking and read Shakespeare and talk of Westminster Abbey! And men with unpronounceable names *bragged* to me that their mother's ancestors were English!' He returned as an ardent apostle of 'this magnificent vision of a federation with America. It is the biggest thing possible in the world to-day.' He enlisted, or tried to

enlist, newspaper editors and influential politicians in this holy cause. It helps to explain his hostility to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 ('this d—d Japanese Treaty'), which was an obstacle to the realization of his dream. He had little time to promote the project after Churchill became First Lord. The new First Lord kept him too busy.

His active influence on naval policy continued after he left Whitehall, especially through correspondence and visits with McKenna. He preached the need for development of submarines, but at the Admiralty only McKenna seemed to be interested. To the officer in command of submarines, Captain Sydney S. Hall, he wrote (January 9th, 1911): 'If we can get submarines to cross the Atlantic unconvoyed and with a gun, then the United States will open her arms to us for fighting reasons as well as political. They are getting in a blue funk over there of Germany and Japan coalescing.'

He also pushed hard for the adoption of the oil engine. 'Sea warfare will be revolutionized by the internal combustion principle and the submarine, and engineers and stokers will be a drug in the market!' (Fisher to Fiennes, December 19th, 1910). In 1890 the reciprocating steam engine held the field. In warships it was rapidly superseded by the steam turbine after the turn of the century, and more gradually in merchant ships. In 1908, the diesel engine, an internal-combustion engine which uses the heavier oils, of high flash-point (as differentiated from I.C. engines that used motor spirit — gasoline — as fuel), began to be used successfully, first in submarines (D class), then in small surface craft — not so much because of its economy, but because it did away with the necessity for carrying motor spirit, which is very dangerous afloat. But Fisher's sanguine expectations as regards the diesel engine were not borne out by actual material developments. In small capacities diesel engines are efficient and far superior to steam machinery both in economy and in the space they occupy, and they have come to be used for motor torpedo-boats, destroyer-escorts, landing craft, minesweepers, and the like, in addition to submarines and smaller merchant ships. But when large power is required, as in destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and aircraft carriers, steam turbines have no rival. To be sure, diesel engines are used extensively as an *auxiliary*, for electrical power supply in battleships, cruisers, and aircraft carriers; but Germany was the only country that developed the diesel engine for main propulsion purposes in major fighting ships, notably in the post-World War I 'Deutschland' class 'pocket' battleships.

Even more than when in power Fisher busied himself with 'the claims of our splendid personnel, *the cream of the nation!*'

> I keep on telling McKenna (I wrote him 8 sheets the other day!) that he will be wise to anticipate the irresistible coming agitation for greater recognition of the rank and file of the Navy and their legitimate aspirations. And this includes of course the Navy being open to all by the State paying for the whole support of the Osborne Cadets until their pay supports them without! So long as I remain a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence I am absolutely precluded from opening my mouth, or this great subject would induce me to go on the stump! (Fisher to Yexley, October 5th, 1911).

His 'private campaign' included also 'the greater recognition of our Bluejackets and Marines to attain commissioned rank'. But there was no driving force at the Admiralty for such measures.

The main lines of his policies were being maintained by Wilson. He thought his successor was 'doing splendidly and is unassailable' (June 1910). But Wilson, as matters developed, had not been the best choice possible. McKenna found him 'very difficult', the Sea Lords resented his obstinacy, high-handedness, and secretiveness, and Esher and Haldane, among others, were unhappy over the way Wilson ignored both the C.I.D. and the Navy War Council. 'Haldane — who is not a Fisherite by any means — was lamenting yesterday the change that has come over the Board of Admiralty. No doubt the "service" may have benefited, but the doors of the Admiralty are closed to all new ideas and new developments.'[1] A year out of power Fisher found himself appreciated as never before. Concrete evidence was provided on his seventieth birthday, when he went off the active list.

> You are splendid at enigmas [he wrote White, January 28th, 1911] and unparalleled in paradoxes. So please explain why after a year's seclusion and total abstinence from any species of public worship I get a greater mass of telegrams and letters than when in the full swing of a fighting life I left things suddenly with Elisha! (*And how he has smacked Jordan about with his mantle!!!* Elijah nowhere!!!).

[1] Esher to Balfour, September 30th, 1910; *Esher*, III, 25.

On February 18th, 1911, the Admiral and Lady Fisher left England for a holiday of indefinite length on the Continent. By October, Pallanza, Bologna, Florence, Venice, Bad Nauheim, and Lucerne had been visited, in that order. He had the time of his life. When he was not working on his papers, he was 'simply revelling in enjoyment!' Never was his health better or his spirits higher. From Bad Nauheim about August 1st he wrote to Cecil Fisher:

> I'm just off to a final lunch with the McGowans. He gave me a final banquet last night, and then he took me to a ball to dance with a merry widow from Michigan, and we had the 'Merry Widow' waltz TWICE OVER!!! I never stopped for two whole waltzes!!! and dear old McGowan confided to me, on saying good night about midnight, that if only he had me and Jane's [Mrs. Cecil Fisher's] father, he would sweep the world of Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and Rothschilds!!!

From Lucerne in September he passed this delightful story on to his son: 'An American looking down the crater of Vesuvius in eruption said, "*It's like Hell!*" An Englishman heard him and said to himself, "How these Americans do travel"!!!'

Letters from men of influence, including McKenna, entreated him to return to England. He would not budge, refusing, as he put it, to get between Wilson and the limelight. Besides, 'As a solid matter of fact, not even a comma has as yet been altered in the programme I left behind' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, September 29th, 1911). His plan was to keep away from England until March 1912, when Wilson was due to go on the retired list. 'Then *Resurgam*': he would play a more active role on the spot in helping to formulate naval policy and to preserve all he had done. He did not have to wait until 1912. McKenna's replacement by Churchill on October 24th, 1911, opened up fresh vistas and marked a turning point in Fisher's career. On October 25th Churchill wrote the old sea dog: 'I want to see you very much. When am I to have this pleasure? You have but to indicate your convenience, and I will await you at the Admiralty.' Fisher was ready. Twenty-one months of leisure seem to have given him an elixir of life that had fortified his energy and renewed his youth.

238: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

February 1st, 1910

My dear First Lord,

So long as I don't hear from you I shall believe all is going well with our sweet patient (I think 'Patience' wouldn't be a bad name for her!), so I beg you not to trouble to write to me at all. (You will have plenty on your mind without me!) Also I beg you not to bother about your telling me of your results at Windsor, either.

I presume Battenberg recognizes his career is finished by his not going to the Mediterranean. No one would give him either the Home Fleet after May (which he aspires to) or have him as Second Sea Lord. There would be such an anti-German crusade — ill-deserved but none the less effective! So he's wiped out! Others above him will estop him from Devonport. Also I grieve at Jellicoe not going to the Atlantic. You were ready to stick to the plan and Wilson had acquiesced. What fools people always are to ask advice. Thank God I never did! However, you could not but tell Jellicoe as you so wisely did. Poë's an ass — but the Mediterranean don't require anything else.[1] Your letter to Knollys summed it all up beautifully, and you can tell the copyist how I enjoyed her handwriting. It's lovely how she throws in promiscuous capitals, which are most effective.

Please report to Knollys without fail your views of the political situation — he may be timid as to introducing the subject, so I hope you'll bring it on, and with the King if you get the opening. It's pretty cool of me giving you advice! But there's Aesop's Fable, which you see illustrated in every railway station to advertise Polson's Cornflour, of the mouse helping the lion!

Remember, Wilson never was a judge of men, so you must judge for yourself. He has Sturdee in his eye to succeed Jellicoe.[2] Sturdee could not have come now anyhow, hence Wilson's pleasure at Jellicoe's remaining on. I have a firm belief in Providence and that

[1] Battenberg was Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, 1908-1910; he was succeeded by Jellicoe in December 1910 (-December 1911). Admiral Sir Edmund Poë succeeded Admiral Curzon-Howe as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet in April 1910 (-1912). Further on Battenberg-Jellicoe: 'I am so glad about Curzon accepting [Portsmouth], but deeply regret Battenberg's not succeeding him, so as to have Jellicoe in Atlantic, but you could not help yourself when Jellicoe chose otherwise' (Fisher to McKenna, February 16th, 1910). With this incident Fisher began to sour on Battenberg. On January 10th, 1911, we find him warning Jellicoe: 'Battenberg has not run straight, so be careful of him.'

[2] Sturdee, Rear-Admiral of the 1st Division of the Home Fleet, 1910-1911, did not succeed Jellicoe as Controller.

you are a favourite in that quarter, so I am quite happy as to the future.

Don't fail to tell the patient that the corner of my heart she occupies has been very busy!

Ever yours,

F.

239: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
February 2nd, 1910

Dear Mamma!

As three days have elapsed, I venture to write and wish you joy! I wasn't invited to the bedside, as hoped, but I had an early telephone call, for which I was very grateful, as you had rather got on my nerves! But I don't believe you cared at all! 'You common people of the skies,' etc., etc. Don't write or tell anyone to. I assume all is 'spiffing' if I don't hear.

I got a very intelligent letter from Esher at Windsor Castle, but no doubt Mr. Pamela got it all from Knollys, if he didn't from the King, and so you will be posted up. I think the Prime Minister made a *faux pas* not going to Windsor, yet he is so clever he probably did right in flouting his Sovereign!

I have had sweet communications from John Burns and Lulu Harcourt. 'You never can tell' isn't a bad comforter!

I'm rather proud. Before the dissolution I wrote to a friend and said the total majority over the Conservatives would be 120! I believe it's 124. (Allow me to prophesy for you yourself when next we meet!)

You will remember the Emperor Diocletian doffed the Imperial purple and planted cabbages. My first days are so promising I think I shall find it also a success. Also I am learning golf. Across the river here lives a millionaire with his private links and a professional always attending. The charming thing is there are comfortable seats at each hole where one rests. I hope when the roses are blooming in June you will come and try those seats!

If you take any steps to get this letter answered, I will never speak to you again!

Yours,

F.

240: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
February 2nd, 1910

Private
My beloved E.,

. . . I've just got here from Cheshire, where for days running I've had Paradise. 3 lovely girls in the house, a *splendid* ball-room, and music always on hand. 3 young Guardsmen there, but I held my own! . . . Dancing till 4 a.m. took it out of me a bit, but it revivified me and I renewed my strength like the eagles! Did you ever meet a Lady Jean Cochrane?[1] Such a dancer! but she was an extra! So good-looking.

I hope the King talked politics with McKenna, who is very acute and would sacrifice himself for the King. Didn't you think McKenna excellent, the night he dined with me, as to the course the King should pursue? You see he knows exactly how the Cabinet will be actuated. PLEASE *mention to* Knollys how invaluable for the *King's service McKenna is.*

I had a long *tête-à-tête* with Garvin on Sunday night last. *That man wields great power now.* You ought to see him. He also splendid for the King.

There are great risks. Both sides unscrupulous, but more especially the Tories! Sandars damnable! I don't think Balfour sees through the low-down game of making the King an election cry!

Yours for ever,

F.

241: TO W. T. STEAD

Kilverstone Hall
February 4th, 1910

Private
My dear Stead,

. . . I have had 3 fine offers to be my Southey, but I think it would be you if anyone! However, I have replied to each it cannot be, for good reasons I won't bore you with.

I am not coming up to London till April — not for an hour! So I must disappoint Brocklehurst. I believe in the Jews and always go anywhere to meet them. Their one fault is — *no patriotism.*

[1] Lady Jean Cochrane, daughter of the twelfth Earl of Dundonald, who later married the fifth Marquess of Bristol.

Not a Jew in the Navy! Do you ever hear of one fighting? They have no 'guts'! Carson always beats Rufus Isaacs! A Jew will never fight well in a losing case! As I said before, *they can't fight!* Their one drawback!

Have you seen Kennedy Jones lately? I think him a great man, but I hear he's hated.

Ever yours,

F.

242: TO J. A. SPENDER

Kilverstone Hall
February 5th, 1910

My beloved Spender,

I have just been reading my *Westminster*! (my solace and my joy!), and here are these words about the House of Lords: 'The solution can only be found on elective lines.' I'm a babe in the wood as regards politics, but a babe can see the whole pith of the situation is contained in them — Reiteration is the Secret of Conviction and Repetition is the Soul of Journalism — so I hope you will keep on saying those golden words. Myself I love a mild despotism and a chastened Bismarck, but we can't have either in this free country, where every man can do as he likes, and if he doesn't he's made to! which is what public opinion (as they call it) means. It's damnable! Why should I wear a tall hat when I hate it? (but the King would put me in the corner if I didn't). . . .

Yours,

F.

243: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
February 10th, 1910

Private

My dear Arnold White,

. . . I can truthfully say I never sought the Press, but I recognized it as the one and only engine that could effect the vast revolution from shipbuilding to bread-baking — from kettles to turbines — from fossils to Nelsons that the whole scheme of October 21, 1904, with its 21 points you so admirably summarized in the *Daily Despatch*

of January 26, meant. *Without the Press it couldn't all have been done!* It may not be politic to say this, but it's true. I never gave *déjeuners* to the Press like Beresford at Claridge's, or in my flagship. Even you yourself, perhaps twice you have lunched with me. I don't think anyone else ever has. Perhaps Thursfield once! Those are all eloquent facts.

Yours,

F.

244: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
February 12th, 1910

My dear Pamela,

I might even go so far as to say 'My beloved Pamela'! but I don't want to disturb a happy home, so I don't! I am taking you at your word, but I *do* feel shy at addressing a goddess in this familiar way! Pray, what are you going to call me? The Duchess of Sutherland, *when* she was my very close friend, called me 'the Devil,' but afterwards 'Demon' to soften it! Anyhow, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. (Wait till you see the 10,000 roses here and those two I sent you you never saw — 'Zephyrine Drouhin'[1] and 'Abel Chatenay.' They shall be blooming when you come here with your family.) I've arranged everything for you: two small but sunny rooms looking out on the lake for you two, and the nursery, simply lovely and as big as both your rooms together. The one drawback is that your sweet maid, whom I am looking forward to as the support of my declining years (*when you have done with her!*), will have to share a large room with our lady's maid, who is almost as nice but not quite, but perhaps she won't mind if I am very attentive to her! Fix your time for coming. All others will have to give way, and you'd better stay a week for splendid North Pole air, and let Mr. Pamela go up and down — good trains and convenient, or else motor, which is better. . . .

Ever yours,

'Demon'

[1] '. . . to me, it is astounding that it is so unknown. It is absolutely the only absolute thornless rose; it has absolutely the sweetest scent of any rose; it is absolutely the most glorious coloured of all roses; it blooms more than any rose; it requires no pruning, and costs less than any rose. I planted these roses when I left the Admiralty in 1910. Somebody told the Naval Attaché at Rome, not knowing that he knew me, that I had taken to planting roses, and his remark was: "They'll d—d well have to grow!" He had served many years with me' (*Records*, p. 216). 'Madame Moreau' was his other favourite rose.

245: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
February 13th, 1910

Private

My dear Arnold White,

I am so glad to hear from you this morning that you are not precipitate with your letter, for since I wrote to you I have heard of Sir W. White's envenomed purpose (as 'Civis' in the *Spectator*) to have anyone's blood who backs me, and I understand Strachey supports him! What a huge and colossal mistake these men do make! It's not 'the *Personality*,' it's the '*Message*' that tells! No use attacking the voice tube! It's the message it carries! The two very greatest men in the world said that! John the Baptist and St. Paul! The Baptist: I'm 'a voice'! Paul said: 'My bodily presence is weak and my speech contemptible.' The message: 'For his letters say they are weighty and powerful'!

I think a good text for my Midshipman's *vade-mecum*, which I hope some day to bring out, will be some allusion to this (Blackie[1] I think the origin)! The four things that make a life:

I. A great inspiration.
II. A great cause.
III. A great battle.
IV. A great victory.

Give me these four things and then we shall preach our Gospel of Rest and build an Altar of Repose!

Post compels me to write hurriedly and to stop here. *Please don't answer my letters.*

Ever yours,

Fisher

In turning over papers on my table to get a stamp, I see Rhodes,[2] but I think I must have sent it to you: 'I have found one thing, and that is, if you have an idea and it is a good idea, if you will only stick to it, you will come out all right.' His egotism was sublime. All these great men are so!

[1] John Stuart Blackie, nineteenth-century Scottish professor and man of letters.
[2] Cecil Rhodes, the late-nineteenth-century British empire-builder in South Africa.

246: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

February 22nd, 1910

My dear First Lord,

I moved in the highest circles yesterday [at Windsor Castle], but I feel it's sending coals to Newcastle to tell you all I heard. Nevertheless, there may be a point or two which you don't know of. To commence with I take the smallest item, but it touches us most (if your own tooth is aching, you think more of it than an earthquake in Peru that has swallowed millions!). An agitation is being engineered at Marlborough House that the dormitories at Osborne are unhealthy, and our cad, Armstrong (who is welcomed there), will get it raised in Parliament. Of course the reply is that 7 years nearly has proved its healthiness, and no public school is free from epidemics. I believe at Osborne there's a d—d soft fool called Collingwood as the doctor (as he nearly killed me once, I speak freely!), who did not deal firmly with the business in the incipient stage. I suppose Bridgeman knows all about the business. I am not sure from what I hear that Christian,[1] the Captain, has played fair. Will you ask Bridgeman what his opinion of Christian is? There's nothing more to say on that point — but there *is* danger there — and Esher begged me to warn you to smash them. *You are to keep his name out of it.* (He is very friendly with the Prince of Wales, or rather the Prince of Wales with him! and they have *tête-à-têtes*!)

I saw Knollys also and nearly missed my train through his blandishments. He is much worried and harassed over current affairs, but it seems to me the King's ship is being steered all right — the *media tutissima via*. The King calls him a d—d Radical! Burn this, please! However, his advice seems to be followed all right. 'No vacillation and the Prime Minister wins' was the august dictum, and to me as a very humble outsider it sounded as a phrase conveying the Bovril of the situation!

Prince Henry [of Prussia] told me he was wanting a private talk with the Prime Minister, which of course he will have. He harangued me on two points — that it was a sheer impossibility for Germany to attempt an equality with the British Navy — there was not the money for it; but his chief topic was Japan and the peril imminent that she would reopen war with Russia and seize Vladivostok. He said Japan was honeycombed with German spies and they knew all

[1] Captain (afterwards Admiral) Arthur H. Christian, in command of R.N. College, Osborne, 1908-1910.

that was going on, and England being fooled. Russia had without notice by anyone recently taken away two army corps from the German frontier and sent them to Manchuria. He also said both English and Germans have got to dread the United States, but I didn't follow him, except that as against England 2/3rds of the population of the United States are deadly hostile to England. If I can find it, I will send you a magazine article worth your attention on this point.

(Battenberg told me an awful crammer as to why he hauled off going to the Mediterranean — I let it pass.) Lady Londonderry wouldn't tell me the three scandals that were shaking Society to its foundations, so there's no fun for your Pamela in this letter, but I did hear the young woman had returned to her husband from Paris, where she had strayed!

Please don't answer this letter — I wanted to tell you about Osborne, as it's important to anticipate agitation! You don't want the mothers of England to be aroused! . . .

Best love to the family!

Ever yours,

Fisher

247: TO REAR-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES OTTLEY

Kilverstone Hall
February 25th, 1910

My beloved Ottley,

It was a good day's work for your credit yesterday as Secretary of Defence Committee, if you realize what you got through! I lunched with McKenna and had a long talk with him. He is your good friend. He finds Wilson difficult, but he must put up with that in view of his immense qualities. We both know him well — you and I! Wilson won't see that the Defence Committee is a '*guiding*' power and England's '*All in all*' if properly worked. His policy of leaving the Defence Committee severely alone would kill it and bring in the Minister of Defence he so dreads! The bulwark against Haldane's ambition is the Defence Committee. The only Minister of Defence is the Prime Minister, and the only way he can exercise that power, with his multitudinous work, is by having a secretariat such as is provided by the Defence Committee. George Clarke saw that, but

wanted to put on the Prime Minister's clothes, and so got booted out!

I think that joint Report on Defences really 'tip-top'! It's so very concise and definite! I heard Nicholson[1] say to Wilson that they two must work up Hong-Kong. I suppose on French's Report. I should procrastinate that Report. The War Office game is to increase the Army Estimates — Hong-Kong a good peg no doubt! . . .

Ever yours,

Fisher

248: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
February 28th, 1910

My dear E.,

I suggest your coming here in your motor. You can do it in 4 hours — a splendid bedroom for you, and the air is astounding! straight from the North Pole! For instance, I walked 5 hours yesterday without a rest and never felt a bit tired, and sleep 9 hours when I only have slept 5 hours for the last 13 years! So immediately you are out of your bed get into your motor with furs and come here. We are full up March 18 to March 22, otherwise free, *and a really splendid cook!* So come! . . .

As Spender says, never did men make such asses of themselves as the Liberals, Irish, and Labour in not all coalescing from the first moment. They all three will be sold! How fortune does favour Winston![2]

Yours till death,

F.

Change of air is the *one* thing after influenza!

249: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

February 28th, 1910

My dear Pamela,

What an exquisite pleasure you two have given me! But the

[1] General Nicholson was Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1908-1912.
[2] Churchill had been appointed Secretary of State for Home Affairs in mid-February (-1911).

inscription is awful![1] I've had it draped like Lady Constance Stewart-Richardson! My joke was (original!), when I took the Russian sailors [March 1909] to see Maud Allan,[2] that it was a naval display! (You won't see that!) *But really I love your present!* Who did the Latin? I am collecting your letters. Wasn't it Madame de Sévigné who so coruscated with her pen? So the heading of your collected letters: *A Second Madame de Sévigné*! . . . Fancy your only being 21 — you might be 40! (I mean brains, not looks!)

Yours for ever,

Jacky

250: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
March 7th, 1910

Private and Very Confidential

My dear Arnold White,

I fear I never kept my promise as to telling you what happened when I dined in the highest circles last Sunday night, but there wasn't much to tell, except that the King cordially approved my aloofness till some big event should call me forth, and certainly not to be drawn by Beresford, who I understand is treated more as a buffoon than a critic. He is as cunning as he can be and shifts his ground without being the least abashed when nailed to a lie! They tell me this is the Celtic temperament! The politicians excuse him because they think he's a great sailor, the sailors because they think he's a politician! Anyhow, my most splendid friends say, 'Don't you take any notice; let McKenna pulverize him'.[3]

[1] Inscribed on a lovely vase were the words (in Latin):

To John
Lord Fisher of Kilverstone
First of Admirals
Skilled of Sword, Tongue and Pen
Brilliant in Council and Battle
Dreading Nought
Inflexible, Indomitable, Invincible
This Token of Enduring Friendship
a Gift from
Reginald and Pamela McKenna

[2] Miss Maud Allan, famed for her dance 'with only two oyster-shells and a five-franc piece'.

[3] Further on Beresford at about this time: 'I've no doubt you have all your ammunition ready for Beresford on the Estimates. His collapse is predicted to me from many quarters, but he's like an india-rubber ball; if you squeeze him in one place, he only bulges out in another! He is not collapsible – the only hope is that people will get sick of him!' (Fisher to McKenna, March 4th, 1910). 'One can't tell from newspaper reports what the atmosphere of a Parliamentary debate was, but apparently your Reggie headed off Ananias at every lie he told! and *The Times* reports Beresford in the third person, which will be gall and wormwood to him!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, March 15th, 1910).

I heard from Balfour most cordially on Friday, so whatever the Syndicate may have done in the drawing-rooms of London, they haven't mesmerized Balfour!

I had a long interview with Prince Henry, who told me my own Country was the only place I wasn't appreciated in. I told him that was in the Bible! *Mind you don't mention a syllable of all this I am saying to you.*

I hear Beresford is being run by Sir G. Armstrong and Bellairs — a worthy couple of mud-slingers! . . .

Yours, F.

251: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

March 11th, 1910

My dear First Lord,

I don't think it will be right for you to imply the Japs started the Dreadnought type. The Dreadnought, pure and simple, is the All-Big-Gun! She evolved herself in the Board Room at the Admiralty. Jellicoe knows better than anyone her genesis. She paralysed shipbuilding for over a year (that alone a gold mine!), but also we got the great lead, and that was everything. It seems hardly worth even indirectly noticing Beresford's sneer as to her advertisement. As Sir C. Dilke said yesterday in an interview in *Daily Chronicle*, he with lots of others were against her but are now converted. All nations building Dreadnoughts, and all nations can't be fools, and she was specially distasteful to the Germans, as she damned the Kiel Canal! and damned all her Navy and all her harbours also! Yet they followed! And we plunged for turbines with only a sloop before her — the *Amethyst*. That was another reckless revolution! I wish you'd tell Jellicoe what you are going to say before you tell it, so as to make sure. That Pamela of yours hit the bull's eye when she said the Japs mixed their armament, so no Dreadnought! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

252: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
March 14th, 1910

Private

My blessed E.,

. . . I lunched with Asquith. He was *more than cordial!* How funny it is that I did *infinitely more* for the Conservatives than for the *Radicals*,

and yet the Radicals have given me all I have got and the Conservatives have only given me abuse and calumny!

The Radicals gave me my £2,000 [pension] a year and a Peerage, and [yet] I increased the Radical Estimates nearly 10 millions! I decreased the Estimates 9 millions and reduced prospective charges by nineteen millions sterling for the Conservatives, and they never lifted even a little finger to help me, *but on the contrary* have heaped dunghill abuse on me! *How do you explain this?* I worked for Selborne and Cawdor as I never worked before in my life, and neither of them sent me one line on my getting my Peerage. McKenna, whose life has been a burden on my account, gives me a thing that would do for an Ascot Gold Cup, with the inscription I enclose. Luckily it's in Latin, or I dare not let it be seen! (The Craven Scholar writes to me it's the best Latin he ever read in his life!) I wouldn't write all this to anyone else, but *is it not all of it phenomenally curious?*

Well, after *longo intervallo* I took your advice and seized an opportunity which called for communicating with Winston, and he sent me *by return of post* a most affectionate letter and says I am the one man in the world he really loves![1] and 2 days afterwards got an invitation to meet him and his wife at Camford [?] to an inner circle, but I did not accept that — wiser not, I thought; the King would have had a fit! . . . Rayleigh[2] gave me a warm message from Balfour (*thanks to you, that is!*), and Balfour sent me a telegram the day he left, asking me to try and see him on his return, so I am making the best of both worlds!

McKenna has got hold of a most astounding bit of impossibility, that Balfour could get out of much difficulty by making me the First Lord of the Admiralty if he came in. Don't mention this to a soul. To my mind it's too ludicrous to think of, with Selborne, Cawdor, Long, and Curzon[3] all 4 wanting it! Besides, my sympathies are not with the Conservatives. They are, as 'Dizzy' said, 'a stupid party'.

[1] *Memories* (p. 196) adds at this point material not in the original letter to Esher: 'Well! I really love him because he's a great fighter.' Churchill's letter of March 3rd began: 'I was truly *delighted* to get your letter. I stretched out several feeble paws of amity, but in vain. I like you very much indeed, and I am only sorry that the drift of events did not enable us to work together. Your elevation to the peerage was a source of real pleasure to me, and was a partial recognition of the great services you have rendered to British naval supremacy.'

[2] The third Baron Rayleigh, well-known physicist and Conservative member of the Lords, Balfour's brother-in-law, and one of Fisher's two sponsors in the House of Lords. The Admiral was introduced into the House of Lords on March 10th, 1910.

[3] The first Baron (afterwards first Marquess) Curzon, in the high command of the Conservative Party, later member of the War Cabinet, 1916-1918, and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1919-1924.

I should just *love* to fire a bombshell in Rosebery's debate.[1] There never was such weakness as his proposals! Those Irish are THE fools of the situation! Their *one, one* chance was to go *solid ab initio* with Asquith. Even yet the Liberals can win if the 124 are solid to the finish! But fancy my talking to you about these things! Coals to Newcastle with a vengeance! Don't bother to answer. What a joke if you and I and George Clarke were put on to reform the House of Lords!

Please take care of your precious self.

Ever yours, F.

253: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
March 17th, 1910

My dear Pamela,

I don't know that I should have quite answered your letter by return of post except to urgently entreat you to take off your spouse *at once* for a sea trip in the *Enchantress*, or, anyhow, a 'spell off' somewhere! as I hear he looks quite done up, but evidently he's not *hors de combat*! He has fought splendidly! I LOVE HIM!! You have sent me a sweet letter! I LOVE YOU ALSO!! But imagine my delight in quite casually and accidentally finding a fellow-worshipper, who harangues me on two sheets about your brains! (Being a woman, I suppose she doesn't care a d—n about your looks! which I myself much admire!)

P.S. I don't think I ever told you another episode which tickled me awfully. Madden gravely told me, as a thing I ought to know, that '*you were a very clever woman*'.

Well, I daren't really put on paper stories about myself which far surpass those you tell me of Michael and his likenesses! Though perhaps they would be better written than said, as like the rose you would like to blush unseen! . . .

In haste, Ever yours,

'Jacky'

. . . The King has got his job to steer between Scylla and Charybdis! I would like to bet you there will be no dissolution! Reformation better than revolution!

[1] The fifth Earl of Rosebery, onetime Liberal Prime Minister (1894-1895), that day raised again in Parliament the question of the reform of the House of Lords. He moved 'that the possession of a peerage should no longer of itself give the right to sit and vote in the House of Lords'.

254: TO LIONEL YEXLEY

Kilverstone Hall
March 23rd, 1910

Private and Confidential
My dear Yexley,

I very greatly appreciate your kind intention as to writing about me, but were I to consent or aid or abet you in the slightest degree, I should get into boiling hot water because five distinguished persons have each severally desired to be 'my Southey,' but I boomed them off, each one, and said I would be my own 'Southey' when the time came along for so doing, for it is quite impracticable, I think, for anyone to deal with the forepart of my troubled existence, and that portion is infinitely the best — the latter part only the fruit! Mr. Stead without my knowledge fired off 'a character sketch', as he called it, in February *Review of Reviews, and it was really well done . . . Also don't you think everyone is jolly well sick of that d—d First Sea Lord!?* Too much jam!

Secret. I had a very nice letter from Cawdor two days ago praising me for taking no notice of Beresford. I told him of that great man Archbishop Whately, who said: 'Don't fight a chimney sweep! You may knock him senseless, but some of the soot comes off on you!'[1] I prefer, however, your simile: 'Don't throw stones at a yelping cur — he only barks the more!' Convict Beresford of one lie, he only tells another! How Macnamara did keep him on the run on the Navy Estimates debate!

For ever yours obliged,

Fisher

Please burn this letter.

255: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
March 24th, 1910

Private
My beloved E.,

I sent you a telegram from Ely on my way down (I caught my train by ½ a minute!), as my cogitations impelled me to suggest to you that Asquith obviously does not see the fallacy of Wilson's reasoning, which as you very acutely observed would kill the

[1] Fisher had got this story from Arnold White in 1900 and never tired of using it.

Defence Committee as a whole in its GUIDING, but not in its administrative or executive power, which are non-existent and inimical to its existence. But its 'GUIDING' power is England's '*all-in-all*,' if only its sufficiency and efficiency could be digested!

I had an immense talk with McKenna! (It reminded me of Louis XIV, in his wife's bedroom!) I don't think you value his capacity as I do, but *n'importe*! You know he is able and loyal! He was 'dead on' for your nucleus crew committee.[1] Of course the Ideal was your being President, but I suppose the 'Shifting Man' [as President], according to the subject and the Department concerned, has its merits and advantages. Anyhow, I entreat you to prepare the ground with Asquith before Ottley goes to him. I never know what Haldane is up to. Some day he will be hoist with his own petard! I thought that joint Report on Defences most masterly, so concise and definite! We did a good day's work yesterday. The Prime Minister seems to lean on Crewe[2] politically, from what I hear!

Yours for ever,

F.

256: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
March 25th, 1910

Private and Confidential

My dear Arnold White,

It appeals to me your wishing to write about the seed-time of my life! '*A syndicate of Southeys*' would suit my idea! I told Miss Moorhouse (as was) that I proposed preparing episodes and then they could be strung together with, interspersed, the necessary literary diamonds you and others would provide! The pearls might be mine, but the lustre would be yours! But as yet I've hardly had time to think. So much to close up after so many years in the thick of it. I am evading all fresh obligations, even in the Defence Committee (where it was desired to make me too prominent!), so that I may be quite free for a new departure! A campaign on perspective!

Haldane has so rolled up the Territorial pill in jam that it has been swallowed with avidity by the Public.[3] The diarrhoea is coming

[1] See above, p. 284, n. 1.

[2] The first Earl (afterwards first Marquess) of Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1908-1910.

[3] Haldane's Army reform of 1907 had converted the inefficient Volunteer force into a field army ('Territorial Army') for home defence, organized on the same pattern as the regular divisions, which were then liberated to go abroad as the Expeditionary Force.

along! Not now, but in about 2 years hence, when the Army Estimates will be forced up at the expense of the Navy! There's only so much money for the Defensive Services, and every penny given to the Army is *two* pence taken from the Navy. Comparatively, the Navy is vital and the Army a plaything! It is not invasion we have to fear; it's starvation! The sense of proportion is being lost sight of by the Public. The Army is a plutocracy and rules Society. The Navy is poor and democratic. Like the Chinese the British Public don't know perspective! If you talk and see nothing but Territorials and 'An Englishman's Home',[1] you get like the African insect, the same colour as your environment!

But I never meant to write all this, and *burn it, please!*

Ever yours, F.

257: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
[April 1910]

My all-engrossing Stella!

In reply to your question, please be assured that Vanessa is not in it![2] No! You are firmly locked up in that lovely little red thing you drew (only it's large and *not* little!). When you have wandered more in its labyrinths, *perhaps* you may not then be sorry you found your way there so mysteriously. How big is yours? So many (like frogs) have none!

The two things that rule the world are emotion and earnestness. Neither a frog nor Sir E. Grey will ever rule the world! A *big* heart is *vital*! What a lovely story I could tell you apropos, but it would make you blush. Note it for personal reference when the moon has gone behind a cloud one of those nights you are here.

I fix Friday, June 10th, for you to come here. It will be joyful! The nightingales here are as plentiful as violets. I think you'll love it. *I do, really!* But it's a small house. (You'll see the big one marked out in white tape – it begins in the autumn.) Shall you bring

[1] A 1909 play, by Lieutenant-Colonel Guy L. B. du Maurier, about an invasion of England (by Germany, clearly).

[2] 'Stella' was the name used by Dean Swift, the satirist, for Esther Johnson. He wrote her a series of intimate letters (*Journal to Stella*, 1710-1713), full of the details of his life in London. They were on affectionate terms and, when he died, he was buried beside her. Despite his love for Stella, Swift became involved with Esther Vanhomrigh, for whom his pet name was 'Vanessa'. 'I keep all your letters – about the only ones that I do. By-and-by we'll have Dean Swift and Stella, and Una thrown in as Vanessa!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, April 5th, 1910). Una may have been the McKenna maid.

Michael? There's a lovely room for him and his nurse. If you don't bring him, you could bring Barbara — only room for three persons, so you'll meet no one else. If you come in your motor, we have a room kept furnished for the chauffeur in our chauffeur's house in the stables, also a room for a man-servant, but your sweet maid will perhaps not mind sharing a large room with a screen with our lady's-maid. Such a view she will have! (I've never yet spoken to her about coming with me when I am decrepit. Do you think she will?) If you don't come in your motor (it's a splendid road here), the *2:40 p.m.* from St. Pancras is the train, and our motor and vehicle for maids and luggage will meet you at Thetford. The golf links are exquisite, so your 'hubby' will be happy, and my son plays well, I believe. Stop as long as you can when you do come. . . .

Now I think I must stop. I always write to you *currente calamo* (as the Latin grammar says), with a running pen, but then you entice me, for my spirits are kept up by you! 'The flattery of one's friends is required as a dram to keep up one's spirits against the injustice of one's enemies.'

As to writing that book you mention, you tempt me by your opinion, because you are not a fool. Five 'Southeys' have up to date proposed to write the book for me — all distinguished. One woman tempts me called Moorhouse. She wrote a Pepys Diary [*Samuel Pepys*, 1909] — quite exquisite. A woman, as Pascal says, writes by the heart and not by the reason!

As this letter is only for your eye, egotism don't matter, but the strange thing is that by far the best part of my life in works and results was as a Midshipman and a Lieutenant. I commanded a ship at 19, the day I was 19, and sent on a fighting expedition by myself, and calculated eclipses at 16, and wrote a paper on the dip of the magnetic needle, but everyone in the world believes I was only born on October 21st, 1904, when I became First Sea Lord! I think I might compile a series of 'Episodes of a Life', and what an occupation it might be for you in that hulk in Portsmouth Harbour by-and-by to string them together. *Yours would be the diamonds interspersed to give the value and the brilliancy!* A string of pearls with diamonds between each pearl! *Lovely!* Let Paradise be ours!

Yours,

'The Dean'

When you have time and inclination (not otherwise), please write.

258: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

April 2nd, 1910

My *beloved* Pamela!

Forgive the affection, but I can't help it! The photograph is delicious! Let Mrs. Troubridge sculpt you like that. I'll pay! It's so like the famous picture in the National Gallery. I am 'dead-on' with Mrs. Troubridge! I've only seen her that once you kissed her in St. Faith's Chapel, but she writes like a genius!

> 'If such the sweetness of the stream
> What *must* the fountain be?' — Toplady

(*Why didn't I think of writing that to you?*) . . .

You are going to remain on at the Admiralty, General Election or not! *I am in the Tory fold now!* (*What stupid idiots they are!* I am so glad now I told the King last October, and I wrote it down for him, that had they passed the Budget, the House of Lords would have gone on for another hundred years. Now they've committed suicide!)

I *know* I can trust you. There's what the Bluejacket calls 'a Hell of a row' in the Tory camp! Balfour has given Walter Long a cold douche! Long wanted to be Deputy Leader. Anyhow, as *one* of the resulting consequences they neither want or expect him to win in an Election — IF it comes soon. In 18 months, yes. What a pity our Prime Minister is not '*a fighter*' (I *do love* '*a fighter*'*!*). He's so splendid in talk and looks the part! But

> 'He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dreads to put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all'![1]

He could have had the 124 solid [Parliamentary majority] *from the first!* Nevertheless, it's going to come off all right. *Secret.* Winston wrote to me to that effect, so he thinks so, *or did!* (I didn't go to stay with him as asked.)

Esher writes I am all there with the Tories. Lee, M.P., has written me four sheets of love letter! Esher says they waited to see the cat jump! Surely, Beresford was not the cat? No, I think they see I'm an extinct volcano, so they don't mind 'the craythers' now!

[1] From 'My Dear and Only Love', by James Graham, first Marquess of Montrose, a Scottish soldier of the early seventeenth century. The third line should read: 'That dares not put it to the touch'; and 'gain' for 'win' in the last line.

I have said the same thing to 3 Prime Ministers I have served under as you propose to enlarge upon, as regards the U. S. A. and Japan. So I don't put you off there at all! *Burn this letter, please.*

Old Stead was inspired when he said 2 keels to 1. Garvin was inspired when he backed Stead. Lee, M.P., and the Tories d—d fools when they did not swallow it whole! In the Navy Debates on Estimates recently Beresford reiterated that Stead and Garvin were 'wild men'. You'd better look at Beresford's exact words. It ought to be 'rubbed in' that Beresford reiterated that Stead and Garvin were lunatics! as by-and-by, as sure as fate, the 2 keels to 1 will be obligatory.

I am most amazed, I think, how entirely it has escaped all notice, except by Mahan in his famous article (in the *Scientific American*, I think!), where he says, '88 per cent of the British guns are trained on Germany' (or words to that effect), how such a vast swinging round of our naval force was effected without anyone perceiving it! That d—d First Sea Lord never said one word, but the naval movements of ships were so gradually adjusted as to cause it all without the Foreign Office or the Cabinet or any Foreign Admiralty or any journalist or any other d—d fool ever saying a word! (Again I say, Burn this letter!) *There is not one written word anywhere to say it was going to be done! . . .*

Yours,

F.

261: TO GERARD FIENNES

Twatley Farm
Malmesbury, Wilts
April 17th, 1910

My dear Fiennes,

. . . As to personnel, I gave McKenna a splendid speech, and he promised to deliver it on the Navy Estimates, but I never read what he said. Perhaps you will look it up in the Parliamentary Debates. I have not got them here. The point is this: thanks to the Nucleus Crew System, rendered possible by the 'courageous stroke of the pen' of Mr. Balfour's speech at Manchester, when he said, 'the greatest thing since Nelson', I believe, or words to that effect.[1]

[1] Balfour had declared, at *Glasgow*, January 12th, 1905: 'With one courageous stroke of the pen, as it were, these [useless] ships have been removed [from the list of the Royal Navy] . . . of all the reforms that have taken place since the time of Nelson this [the nucleus crew system] is, perhaps, the biggest that has yet been made.'

(N. B. I should reiterate that speech. I had a cordial letter from Arthur Balfour a few days ago, and he stands by that speech, so I expect he'd like it requoted!). I say, thanks to the Nucleus Crew System we are the ONLY nation in the world able to man our War Fleet without calling out our reserves, excepting the *last line*, that is, the 'Special Service' category of ships. But even those vessels have a large nucleus, and the naval pensioners and Royal Fleet Reserve in the neighbourhood of the ports would soon have those vessels fully manned. We have said 4 days. My belief is it would be *4 hours!*

Private. What I left in hand at the Admiralty was an arrangement for a special engagement with some 2,000 of the Royal Fleet Reserve to engage to come instantly on receipt of a telegram, but don't quote this, as still in progress.

Well! The next point I suggest to you to make is what is in or should be in McKenna's speech. Beresford and others say, 'How splendid the German personnel!' All right! They are 3-years men! Every German vessel changes a third of her crew every October. They are not fit to fight till the following May. That is the first time they go out. *Vide* newspapers, you'll see the German Fleet takes its first *big* cruise on May 2nd! Now we have *long service*, tempered by *short service* to a very limited extent indeed. (See the proportion in Navy Estimates and quote it of 5-years men out of the whole 130,000! It's ridiculous!) That *short service* system is in itself more splendid than the entire German system, because we have the men for FIVE years instead of THREE!!! So that if we did away with long service, which we are not even thinking of, we should be better than the Germans by 5 to 3! But the OBJECT of the short service 5-years men was to get a Reserve of OUR OWN MEN, and we *HAVE DONE IT!*

The merchant sailor no use in comparison with men trained in the Navy for 5 years or more. Besides, you took the best men out of the merchant ships *at the very time* they were wanted in those ships! Then the *Royal Naval Reserve* was ridiculously extravagant, because, as two-thirds of the mercantile marine were abroad, you could only rely on getting *one-third* of your *Reserve*, and so had to have THREE times the quantity, and to pay for 3 times more than you wanted!

I am writing very hastily to catch post, so my thoughts not very lucidly put; but read McKenna's speech, as I think he must have said what he promised me he would! You want to rub in that these d—d fools, Beresford & Co., in eulogizing the German Navy are

really advocating short service of THREE years, and their ships unfit to fight from October to April, as compared with our Fleet always on a war footing, with a slight sprinkling of FIVE-years men, as compared with the entire manning of the German Fleet with THREE-years men. 'Repetition is the Soul of Journalism.' Mr. Barnes, the greatest Editor of *The Times*, had that written up in his office!

Yours,

F.

262: TO J. A. SPENDER

Kilverstone Hall
April 22nd, 1910

Private

My dear Spender,

. . . I don't know who your 'Civis' is,[1] but he has a glimmering of the truth in that he says how utterly and fundamentally different sea war is to land war! There are military phrases in his articles few sailors know, but a civilian might. I never yet met a soldier who had the faintest conception of a sea campaign. They read history, but history is a record of exploded ideas! They used to load the guns at the muzzle, now we do it at the breech! In the boilers we put the fire where the water used to be! In Nelson's day the sailors fought and the officers looked on. (*Vide* Nelson at the most critical moment of the battle walking up and down the quarter-deck having a yarn with his Flag Captain! Marvellous that no one has seized that marvellous episode in the most marvellous battle of the world!) Well, now it's solely the officers who win the battle — the sailors are automatons! There are silly asses headed by Spenser Wilkinson who grievously mislead public opinion, and our dear Mr. Haldane is the most misled of all! (But this is only for your own digestion!) . . .

I had a note this morning that Beresford is hatching another naval scare over the Austrian Dreadnoughts. The Navy is the Tories' only chance in an Election! A clever man told me it did wonders for them last time! The *majorité des sots* always win! Heaven bless you! If I was the King, I'd see everyone d—d first before I had another Election!

Yours for ever, Fisher

P. S. What this Country wants is a mild despotism tempered by a chastened Bismarck!

[1] 'Civis' was doing a series of articles on 'A "General Staff" for the Navy?' in the *Westminster Gazette* (April 11th, 18th, 26th).

263: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

May 14th, 1910

My beloved First Lord,

Just got your dear letter, and 'the world not the same world'! — which is sweet of you — and I also have been remiss in writing, but I sent a message to the blessed Pamela by Jellicoe. Perhaps he never gave it — and it's more than ever appropriate now. I said it didn't signify what d—d fools we had to govern us — we got on! The Tories gave up Heligoland, the key of the Baltic, and the Liberals gave up Corfu, the key of the German Mediterranean, as it locks up Trieste, and some other ass gave up Curaçao, the key of the Panama Canal, and Ceuta, more precious than them all (the dowry of a Queen, I think!), but

> 'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star,
> In high cabal have made us what we are'![1]

and now, our splendid King has gone, who had conquered all hearts and annihilated all envy. He wasn't clever, but he always did the right thing, which is better than brains. In the First Book of Samuel and the Xth chapter and 9th verse it says a new heart was given to him when Saul was anointed King. It so happened to our own good King 'Hal'! Let us hope. I had an affectionate half-hour with the Queen — too sacred to talk of. I really felt as I looked at my best friend (as the Queen justly called him) that he was there still! I always knew the Queen in love with him. No one knows what I have lost. I've burnt his letters. Fancy, he was probably coming here yesterday. But he has gone at his zenith like Elijah, Nelson, and Moses: 'His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.' It's the best way to go. That was a fine epitaph [of] one of Nelson's Captains!

> 'Death found him fighting!'

Sir E. Seymour has been a senile ass in your absence, and told the *Daily Mail* a 'naval surprise' was probable! With 'wireless' that you can't gag (you can't cut the air like a telegraph wire or a submarine cable!), with a mighty force of submarines always fully manned and at work, and an incomparable flotilla of torpedo craft, and our warship displacement more than 40 per cent of all the navies of the

[1] This favourite Fisher quotation is from Sir William Watson's 'Ode on the Coronation of Edward VII' (1902). Watson, however, had written 'fostering star'.

really advocating short service of THREE years, and their ships unfit to fight from October to April, as compared with our Fleet always on a war footing, with a slight sprinkling of FIVE-years men, as compared with the entire manning of the German Fleet with THREE-years men. 'Repetition is the Soul of Journalism.' Mr. Barnes, the greatest Editor of *The Times*, had that written up in his office!

Yours,

F.

262: TO J. A. SPENDER

Kilverstone Hall
April 22nd, 1910

Private

My dear Spender,

. . . I don't know who your 'Civis' is,[1] but he has a glimmering of the truth in that he says how utterly and fundamentally different sea war is to land war! There are military phrases in his articles few sailors know, but a civilian might. I never yet met a soldier who had the faintest conception of a sea campaign. They read history, but history is a record of exploded ideas! They used to load the guns at the muzzle, now we do it at the breech! In the boilers we put the fire where the water used to be! In Nelson's day the sailors fought and the officers looked on. (*Vide* Nelson at the most critical moment of the battle walking up and down the quarter-deck having a yarn with his Flag Captain! Marvellous that no one has seized that marvellous episode in the most marvellous battle of the world!) Well, now it's solely the officers who win the battle — the sailors are automatons! There are silly asses headed by Spenser Wilkinson who grievously mislead public opinion, and our dear Mr. Haldane is the most misled of all! (But this is only for your own digestion!) . . .

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world put together, and yet this d—d fool talks of a naval surprise! And he also told his audience at the Academy dinner the *Dreadnought* was a mistake, and naïvely added he would sooner command a Dreadnought than anything else! It's very difficult to obey St. Paul and 'suffer fools gladly'! . . .

Ever yours,

Fisher

264: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING

The Athenaeum
Pall Mall, S. W.
May 19th, 1910

Private

My beloved Friend,

You have sent me a very sweet letter. It was nearly too much for me in Westminster Hall — those distant strains of the 'Dead March' in 'Saul' always move me, so I could not lift my eyes to see you or anyone else. *I've lost the greatest friend I ever had* . . . The Queen and Princess Victoria have been very dear to me. Those two knew. We spent a time alone together. The King seemed as if he would wake, did I but touch him! But I mustn't bother you with my grief. *My day is past!* I am going abroad the middle of July. I will come and see you in September, or whenever you are back at Wargrave. I DO appreciate your kind thought of me.

Yours for ever,

Fisher

265: TO JOHN LEYLAND

May 23rd, 1910

Private. Please burn.

My dear Leyland,

. . . Repington has just been to McKenna to sell him his pen if McKenna will give him information, and he promises to damn Thursfield and the ideas of a General Staff for the Navy. He says he has 4 influential papers in the palm of his hand. He sounded McKenna if he (Repington) could attack me. He got Hell in reply to that. McKenna played with him to get all he could out of him and then bowed him out. Let us 'wait and see' what now happens!

Beresford, I hear, is rallying his forces and thinks he has now the highest circles with him, and there are exultant hopes of damning all my schemes! Well! it can't be helped if they do. We have fought a good fight. My day is past. I have no illusions. . . .

Ever yours,

F.

266: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
May 27th, 1910

Private

My dear E.,

Though your letter is so sad, yet it was a great comfort to me. '*Tempus edax rerum.*'[1] I suppose we shall get used to a new régime! and if our beloved Knollys has his hand on the tiller, we may feel happier than would be otherwise possible, for I do believe the new King does rightly trust him to the full! It will be interesting to see how the Londonderry faction will fare. They are jubilant just now as to their ascendancy! . . .

Secret. The Commonwealth Government have just sent a confidential telegram to Sir George Reid[2] to ask me to go as their guest to advise on the Navy. I've declined. I'd go as Dictator but not as Adviser. Also they have commenced all wrong and it would involve me in a campaign I intend to keep clear of with the soldiers. By the wording of the telegram I expect further pressure. Besides what a d—d fine thing to get me planted in the Antipodes![3]

[1] The first words from Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, 234.

> Thou all-devouring time, thou envious age
> Nought can escape thee, and by slow degrees
> Worn by thy teeth, all things will lingering die.

[2] Sir George Reid, onetime Prime Minister of Australia (1904-1905), High Commissioner for Australia, 1910-1916.

[3] In the version for *Memories* (p. 199) Fisher added: '[Kitchener and the Australians, in drawing up their scheme of defence, forgot that Australia was an island. So do we here in England.]' Field-Marshal the first Viscount (afterwards first Earl) Kitchener had been in Australia and New Zealand, late in 1909, advising the Dominion Governments on their organization for defence. His recommendations for Australia included the organization of a sizable army – 80,000 peace strength, 107,000 war strength, raised by compulsory service. It was adopted in 1910. He joined the Committee of Imperial Defence in October 1910. Fisher persuaded the Australian Government to take Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, who went to Australia (1910-1911) to advise on naval defence matters. He presented recommendations with regard to the establishment of an Australian Navy. See below, p. 387.

Private. A. K. Wilson told McKenna if any attempt under the new régime to make Beresford Admiral of the Fleet, he should at once resign. McKenna said he would also. . . .

What a truly wonderful episode your interview with Wilhelm!!![1] I do hope he was cordially welcomed by his relatives, for I agree with you that he has real affection in his heart that is good for peace. . . .

Yours,

F.

267: TO CAPTAIN SYDNEY S. HALL[2]

Kilverstone Hall
June 21st, 1910

Private and Confidential

My dear Hall,

. . . Now as to your vital question. The answer is, it entirely depends on your domestic finances and feelings. I had to solve the same question for myself 25 years ago. I was offered practically *£10,000* a year and the security of the greatest bankers in the world, and the certainty almost of being a millionaire. I declined, because I wanted to be Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, and First Sea Lord, and work a revolution! I managed the lot! thanks to a kind Providence. Bacon came to me and I told him the same, and that he could be the same if he remained in the Navy![3]

SO CAN YOU!

So I would strongly advise you to hang on, but you, like Bacon, may prefer the present to the future, but it ought to be an immense good

[1] Esher had spent forty minutes alone with the Emperor on May 23rd. 'My firm belief is that of all the royal visitors the only *mourner* was this extraordinary Kaiser' (Esher to Fisher, May 24th, 1910; *Esher*, III, 4, with one slight change.)

[2] Afterwards Admiral Sydney S. Hall, Inspecting Captain of Submarines, 1906-1910. Hall 'with Admiral Bacon did more for submarines than anyone living' (Fisher's note on a letter from Hall of December 11th, 1913). Alfred Yarrow (afterwards first Baronet), the Clyde shipbuilder, told Fisher early in the month that he contemplated building submarines 'so as to oust the Germans in foreign orders that they are getting, as no firm in this country has taken on building submarines for foreigners . . . a man of Yarrow's immense resources in talent and money (I believe he has got two millions sterling!) should be encouraged to make submarines a great private industry and so increase our war capabilities by getting foreign orders in this Country' (Fisher to Hall, June 11th, 1910). Yarrow was after some Board officer to leave the Navy and join him. None being available apparently, he became interested in Hall.

[3] Bacon had left the Admiralty (Director of Naval Ordnance) in November 1909 to become Managing Director of the Coventry Ordnance Works (-1915).

offer that should tempt you. I got £7,000 a year for Bacon, with other certainties. I should think he will retire having made his fortune in about 10 years' time, and Crease will succeed him and make his. Yarrow is a Jew — *but a good one.* He will keep his word, but he will have his pound of flesh. If he means business, he won't hesitate at any sum you like to ask. If the Admiralty have any regard for the interests of the Navy, they won't let you go.[1]

Ever yours,

Fisher

268: TO MRS. J. A. SPENDER

Kilverstone Hall
June 23rd, 1910

Dear Mrs. Spender,

You are like that very lovely woman who knew me and I didn't know her who said, 'The moon looks on many rivers, the rivers only look on one moon'! No, I can't be in London the day you say, as we have friends coming here, and also I think I am wise in picking off dead roses and not picking holes in other people! '*J'y suis, j'y reste*'! When the geese cackle outside the British gates (if Alfred reads this, I shall probably be bowled over in my classical allusion!), I'll emerge!

Yours till we meet again (is what you told me!),

F.

269: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
July 15th, 1910

Private. Burn.

My dear Friend,

Your letter as to Armstrong is confirmed from other sources. The one great object now is to get Beresford made Admiral of the Fleet, and the ONLY route is via Marlborough House! *It won't come off!*

[1] Hall wanted to go. McKenna was willing, but his colleagues were not. Hall's alternative was to resign his commission, but he was dissuaded by Fisher. 'If I were in his [Yarrow's] place, I would get you at *any* cost, but you yourself may justly hesitate at cutting yourself off from the undoubted great career you have before you' (Fisher to Hall, August 11th, 1910).

Mutiny still has its penalties, notwithstanding London drawing-rooms and Duchesses![1] . . .

No, I'm doing very nicely as the mole! I had a great dinner with Knollys, Sir C. Hardinge, Esher, and Sir A. Davidson last Monday, and a big time with the fullest meeting of Defence Committee we've ever had yesterday. But don't mention either of these two items to anyone.

You have captured Kennedy Jones of the *Daily Mail*, etc., etc., by your words, 'The mothers know little of food values, what to buy, how to cook what they buy'. That man will do great things for those masses of the poor, who now deteriorate on tinned foods! *I hope to help him.*

I've had a cordial letter from Balfour in the last week. Thanks to you and others I've not gone under!

Yours,

F.

Read a splendid article on Pitt's campaigns (review of Corbett's recent great book), especially the last paragraph, in Literary Supplement of *Times* of July 7th.[2] That paragraph wants to be reiterated. *Repetition is the Soul of Journalism.* I gave it yesterday to Lord Morley and Sir E. Grey and hammered it in! *Go and do thou likewise!*

[1] On the same general theme: 'And as you say, Sir G. Armstrong and Co. ruling the Navy and quite possibly imagining that vast armada of over 400 fighting vessels that went to the manœuvres was *their* doing! *their organization*, and *their* triumph! Let it be so! One to Heaven [Elijah-Fisher] and one is left ashore [Elisha-A. K. Wilson]! Pharaohs arise that know not Joseph! It's the way to the Promised Land!' (Fisher to White, July 28th, 1910). The 'and Co.' especially included Beresford, the Londonderrys, and Commander (afterwards Captain) Sir Charles Cust, third Baronet, Equerry to King George V, 1892-1931.

[2] The last paragraph of *The Times* review of Corbett's *The Campaign of Trafalgar* (1910) reads: 'The conclusion to be drawn from this chapter of history, as related by Mr. Corbett, concerns the relative positions of the Army and Navy in the system of defence of a maritime Power. *Throughout the entire campaign the responsibility for the defence of these islands and for the maintenance of Empire devolved upon the seamen; the functions of the soldiers were secondary and subordinate.* It was essential, however, that the defence should take on the character of offence, and that *the military forces should be used*, as it were, *as projectiles to the guns of the Fleet.* Thus the various expeditions here described were undertaken. It is noteworthy, however, that, launched as they were across waters the command of which was still undecided, both Craig and Baird ran the gravest risk of destruction. Again, *so long as these troops were merely a menace, they operated to hold large forces of the enemy in check*; but as soon as their destination became clear the problem was simplified, and *from the time they landed their value steadily diminished.* The moral, then, would seem to be, as regards the use of the Army, that until the sea command is secured by the defeat or destruction of the enemy's fleet *the threat must remain a threat.* The uncertainty of the actual point aimed at by the expedition *must necessarily demobilize a large number of the enemy's troops*, since every part of the coast at which a landing might take place must be covered and protected.' The italicized words represent Fisher's underscoring in a copy of the review he sent White on August 3rd (p. 332).

270: TO GERARD FIENNES

Kilverstone Hall
July 19th, 1910

Private
Burn this, please.
My beloved Fiennes,

I think it's time I sent you a despatch! What do you think of the new alliance between Lloyd George and Beresford? (*vide* speech of Lloyd George at Bankers' dinner in the City in last Saturday's newspapers).[1] The Cabal is hard at it via Marlborough House, but I don't think they will win! The one object in view now is to get Beresford made Admiral of the Fleet before he is compulsorily retired next February. They will have to walk over McKenna's dead body!

Mr. Gwynne of the *Standard* recently told an M. P. friend of mine that he had 'proofs' of my having bought all the land near Osborne and Rosyth before those institutions were started! Hence my riches! What a joke if I published my return last week to the Super-tax Commissioners that the whole of my private income (including my wife's) is £312.17.6!!![2] However, deep silence, and not an action for libel, is my best defence. I heard Arnold White wrote somewhere lately that the only crime I was not really guilty of was stealing the money chest of the *Indomitable*!

Well, the latest joke is that Kitchener is going out to reorganize the Chinese Army — ours being perfect!

Secret. I've had great success in the Defence Committee. The nucleus crew system has been adopted with phenomenal success, and Asquith delighted! Don't breathe a word of this!

The nucleus crew works the Committee.
The Committee works the Cabinet.
The Cabinet works the Government.
The Government works the Empire
and this is the House that Jack built! (Burn this the moment you read it.)

[1] Lloyd George, at the Mansion House banquet on July 15th, had said: 'I must admit that the increase in [armaments] expenditure, not only in this country, but in every land under the sun, is due to what that fine and distinguished old sailor Lord Charles Beresford [cheers] referred to in the House of Commons the other day as the mad and insane competition in armaments between the various countries in the world.' 'Lloyd George up to his old game against the Navy, and Beresford useful to him, so he advertises him and this captivates Beresford's vanity!' (Fisher to White, July 19th, 1910).

[2] It was during a visit of Mrs. Meynell to Kilverstone in 1910 or 1911 that Fisher pointed to a little framed Nelson pastel over his bed 'and a couple of despatch boxes on the floor and said, "All my worldly possessions!" ' (Meynell: *A Woman Talking*, p. 75).

Lloyd George and Winston are at their old game on the Navy. Winston gushed and asked me to lunch. I said I was *engaged* to McKenna! which I think he saw was 'neat'! White is beginning a new campaign in last week's *Spectator* against the Dreadnought, and I never read such a rotten [leading] article as in *The Times* yesterday on Dreadnoughts. Thursfield is senile. If, as they now want to make out, the *Dreadnought* was only an *improvement* on pre-existing types, and not a *revolution*, then why was the whole shipbuilding of the whole world paralysed for 1½ years by the advent of the *Dreadnought*? Like the planet Neptune, the discovery of the *Dreadnought* was inevitable, but luckily we saw her in the heavens before the other chaps and got our unparalleled lead! Thank God! Bacon's paper before last naval architects worth your study, on 'The Battleship of the Future'.[1]

Don't worry to answer. Heaven bless you. Garvin coming to stay here to-day! *Very private.* Kennedy Jones invited himself here, and he went away wearing my shoes, which he hasn't returned! He seems a very able man and seemed delighted with his stay here.

Yours for ever,

F.

271: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
August 3rd, 1910

Burn, please.
Private

My dear Friend,

At last this afternoon I've got the enclosed of which I told you *the last paragraph is* '*the Bovril of War*'*!* and yet we are such d—d fools as to put the War Office on the same pedestal as the Admiralty! The First Sea Lord AND NONE OTHER is going to direct the War! and considering how fathomless is the effect of wireless (at the Admiralty before I left we heard two Post Captains talking to each other abreast of the Garden of Eden in Mesopotamia!), and how every ship on the ocean is within the ken of the Admiralty in a few seconds (you can't 'gag' the air or cut the atmosphere like a telegraph wire!), then I say to you more than ever is it the case, as stated by Corbett, 'the maintenance of the Empire devolves upon the seamen', and my dear friend Wilson is the right man in the right place! . . .

Yours, F.

[1] The paper was read at the spring meeting of the Institution of Naval Architects, March 16th, 1910, and was printed in the 1910 volume of the *Transactions of the Institution of Naval Architects.*

Secret. I've had a wonderful invitation from the United States 'to raise the Middle West' (as they call it), but I am not going. Still, it's gratifying. *Boyle's Dictionary*, A.D. 1735, Vol. II, page 574 (Lord Bacon). In his (Lord Bacon's) last will: 'My name and memory I leave to Foreign Nations — and to my countrymen after some time be passed over.'

Vol. XI, p. 110, *Biographical Dictionary*, London, A.D. 1762, Sir William Temple:

> 'He sent his son to acquaint the King that he had resolved to pass the remainder of his life like as a good a private subject as any he had, but never to meddle with any public employment. . . .
>
> '. . . he divided his time between his books and his garden: although in the meanwhile he was frequently consulted by those at the helm, especially after the Revolution, and was even visited for that purpose by King William.'

Augustine Birrell, M.P., gave me this!

272: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
August 5th, 1910

SECRET AND PRIVATE

My beloved E.,

McKenna has just been here on his second visit (so he liked the first, I suppose! I mention this as an inducement for you to come!). He has shown me various secret papers recently distributed to the Cabinet. Evidently Lloyd George and Winston are going to Jonah him, if they possibly can, over the next Navy Estimates. *He is a real fighter* and they will pass over his dead body! If our late Blessed Master was alive, I should know what to do; but I feel my hands tied now. Perhaps a kindly Providence put us both on the beach at the right moment! Who knows? '*The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks*'![1]

I've told Garvin and others that the 2 keels to 1 policy is of inestimable value because it eliminates the United States Navy,

[1] The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes . . . Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. . ..
—Tennyson: *Ulysses* (1842).

which ought never to be mentioned: criminal folly to do so — also it gives us such an ample margin as to allow for discount!

That damnable skunk Sir William White is providing Winston with ammunition, and that blatant ass Strachey of the *Spectator* is also fooled by White. The insidious game is to have an enquiry into the Dreadnought design, which means delay and no money! but don't mention White: it would give him the notoriety he is panting for like Beresford! Do you notice Beresford has been doing cuckoo and laying his eggs in the Osborne nest, distributing the prizes to the Cadets? *So lovely!* that he told the Cadets the *vital essential in the Navy was discipline!* How Beresford got there I don't know! I am told through favour in the highest quarters! Rehoboam made a d—d mess of it when he took the advice of his playmates!

Two immense episodes are doing Damocles over the Navy just now. I had settled to shove my colleagues over the precipice about both of them, but as you know I left hurriedly to get in Wilson! . . .

1. Oil engines and internal combustion, about which I dilated at our dinner and bored you. . . .

The second is that this democratic country won't stand 99 per cent *at least* of her Naval Officers being drawn from the 'Upper Ten'. It's amazing to me that anyone should persuade himself that an aristocratic Service can be maintained in a democratic state. The true democratic principle is Napoleon's: '*La carrière ouverte aux talents*'! The democracy will shortly realize this, and there will be a dangerous and mischievous agitation . . . The pressure won't come from inside the Navy but from outside — an avalanche like A.D. 1788 [*sic*] (the French Revolution) — and will sweep away a lot more than desirable! It is essentially a political question rather than a naval question proper. *It is all so easy*, only the d—d Tory prejudices stand in the way! But I gave you a paper about all this printed at Portsmouth, so won't bore you with more.

I am greatly inclined to leave the Defence Committee and move out in the open on these two vital questions on the Navy. The one affects its fighting efficiency as much as the other. I am doing the mole, and certain upheavals will appear shortly, but it wants a leader in the open! Marlborough House would have a fit! 'King Cust' would collapse! and Sir George Armstrong would be justified! and Carlyon Bellairs might be blacking Balfour's shoes instead of my character!

Yours for ever,

F.

273: TO J. A. SPENDER

Kilverstone Hall
August 8th, 1910

Private

My beloved Friend,

A loan is damnable, and so is an act of Parliament! Observe the *Lion*, launched yesterday. None of you shore-going people can in the least realize her unparalleled power! *The Dreadnought is a flea-bite to her!* The 13-inch gun and the 70,000 horsepower give fighting results I don't write or you'd think I had gone mad like Garvin! And then, lo and behold! you see a little paragraph like that little black cloud that Elijah's servant saw from the top of Mount Carmel (only it portends a d—d sight more!): 'The German firm of Blom & Voss have entered into a contract for a motor liner for the Atlantic trade for the Hamburg-American Line.' *Do you know what that means?* Motor battleships! No funnels — no boilers — no smoke — no engineers — no stokers — only a d—d chauffeur and prodigious economy! '*Colossal billig*'! as the Germans would say! and imagine the fighting effects of all this! They are quite incalculable! And yet these sanguinary asses want to tie the Admiralty hands with an act of Parliament to build dozens — shoals of obsolete vessels before they are launched! Dear Garvin says, 'Oh! give the Sailors a blank cheque', but Parliament won't! No, you are absolutely right in all you say — annex the Sinking Fund. The *one*, *one* virtue of 2 Dreadnoughts to 1 (not 2 KEELS to 1) is that it absolutely eliminates the United States Navy. If we work things right, we shall in due time get a Great Confederation of all of us speaking the same language! So, for God's sake, keep America out of comparisons.

There ought rightly to be another *five* millions increase in next year's Navy Estimates, and McKenna will get it if he fights as he has fought hitherto and you back him. If he takes less or aims at less, he will be in the ditch! *And so will you also!* This Country once roused really on the Navy (*as it could be roused*) would set up an avalanche that would sweep the Liberals out of power for another 20 years. *Balfour knows it!*

And there's another big thing coming along! You can even now hear the rumbling of the earthquake! This democratic country isn't going to stand an aristocratic Navy any more than a non-elective House of Lords! . . . We must have State-paid education for the Navy and sufficient pay for the boy to live on besides till he is a Lieutenant. . . .

I've often told you the real secret of successful administration is the intelligent anticipation of agitation. Control the whirlwind and direct the storm. The Admiralty and the Government must be shoved over the precipice over these two things — oil and internal combustion engines as regards propulsion of warships, and the Navy open to all. I have helped in lots of 'shoves'! The water tube boiler — the turbine — the *Dreadnought* — scrapping — nucleus crews — redistribution of the Fleet — Naval War College — Navigation School — feeding the sailors — etc., etc., etc. In every single one it was '*Athanasius contra mundum*'. The motto is '*Do right and d—n the odds!*'

Yours for ever,

F.

Postscript. That book you gave me is truly splendid! 'The true bore is seldom stupid, and often very clever! But a diet of pearls is extremely boring to the swine.'

Exceptional ability must not be required to graduate.

Cleverness and stupidity are generally in the same boat against wisdom.

A mésalliance is biologically good.

Seek the prizes of your own calling.

A good man is always a novice.

I have got them all by heart!!!

274: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Flüela-Post & Sporthotel
Davos-Dorf [Switzerland]
August 22nd, 1910

My beloved First Lord,

I am en route to a spot *1,115* miles from London, where only bullock carts come and the nearest railway 36 miles off! But I shouldn't be writing to tell you this except that, crossing over from Dover to Calais, the moment I got on the deck of the steamer, Lloyd George and a band of brigands with him rushed at me (M.P.s of sorts they seemed to be!) and I was sat down in the midst of them, and Lloyd George got in the first five minutes, and then I got in 75 minutes by the clock over my head! He said he didn't want to appear to be always fighting against a strong Navy, but he never could properly understand the case, so I said the case was, as Nelson put it,

'that the man would be a d—d fool who fought 10 to 1 if he could fight 100 to 1'. It wasn't a case of two keels to one or three to one! It was simply a case of having such an incontestable and overwhelming supremacy as provided for the possibility of our having some d—d idiot put in command of our Fleets, through popular clamour, and that our Navy so superior in numbers as to provide for even this eventuality, and being able to get rid of a Buller and put in a Roberts in sufficient time to save the situation![1] On the other hand, no folly could be more intense than a loan which involved the building of ships according to Act of Parliament — for no House of Commons will give '*a blank cheque to the sailors*', as Garvin urges in the *Observer*. The *Lion* as superior to the *Dreadnought* as the *Dreadnought* to all before her, and your coming 'Motor Battleship' as superior to the *Lion* as the *Lion* to the *Dreadnought*! Can't afford to drop behind now in any one year, and I think your 60 per cent is really too little. Anyhow, I went on the Big Margin with Lloyd George. Stand out for 5 millions to get 4! He seemed to be imbued with the great fact that really only the Navy mattered, and it didn't matter a d—n about anything else! And as we parted at the train at Calais, he urgently asked me to dine with him or stay with him, or anything! I also told him there was a coming avalanche as to officering the Navy, *and he would have to pay!* This democratic country won't stand an aristocratic Navy! Ninety per cent AT LEAST of the officers from the Upper Ten! (as they may be called!). He said he was willing to pay. It would be a great coup if you got that through: State-paid education and a sufficiency of pay to live on.

Ever yours,

Fisher

275: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Kurhaus Tarasp
Schuls-Tarasp [Switzerland]
August 25th, 1910

My dear First Lord,

Your letter has just reached me here, and I am boiling over with fury against May. He is a cad as well as a coward, unless it may be that he is a dupe, for Battenberg's daughter said her father was

[1] Following the initial British disasters in the South African War, Field-Marshal Lord Roberts had relieved General Sir Redvers Buller of the supreme command (January 1900).

going to have another year of the Atlantic Fleet, and it's quite likely that Battenberg may be engineering May in order to get three years himself! But I say May is a cad, because he knows perfectly your whole course of action in regard to your getting Beresford out of it on the two years' principle, and May is a cad as he assuredly knows how absolutely you would stultify yourself by swerving from the Beresford decision, and he also knows he is playing into Beresford's hands, because as a 'set-off' you would be asked to agree to Beresford's promotion to Admiral of the Fleet as a compensation.

Esher writes me word that Beresford is as busy as a bee, or rather his Syndicate is. Esher tells me that in a *tête-à-tête* dinner with Knollys the latter seemed to be certain you would come out victorious in the Cabinet over the Navy, but they were troubled over the Archer-Shee business[1] as having been engineered in inciting animosity against you. I have no doubt you'll knock them over. Wilson will not stand out against you as against May, and indeed it would be cruel to Bridgeman as knocking him out altogether. It would be too late for him if put off a year. . . .

There's no question of the Germans hating us. This place full of them, and the doctor here (a Swiss) tells me that hatred of us quite occupies them, as they mean fighting! and this doctor sees thousands of the well-to-do Germans.

Ever yours,

F.

276: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

[Kilverstone Hall]
September 26th, 1910

My sweet Sévigné the Second (for your letters will rank with hers!), . . . I don't believe there is the faintest likelihood of a General Election till the autumn of 1911, if then, for the very simple reason that the other side have no leaders and ain't ready. Dear Garvin does fireworks in the *Observer*, but he will not appreciate Lloyd George's intention to remain on! *That's the governing card!* (I told you Lloyd George asked me to visit him! and Winston's bosom friend [F. E. Smith?] has made me great advances. '*J'y suis, j'y reste.*' I go nowhere!) . . .

[1] The famous case of the naval cadet expelled from Osborne in 1908 on the charge of stealing and cashing a postal order belonging to a fellow-cadet. The charge was afterwards proved to be without foundation, and compensation was paid to the boy's family.

I am going to have my picture painted by Herkomer[1] directly after Christmas, as they want to stick it up at Admiralty House, Portsmouth, so you'll see lots of me then! I think I am going to America on November 26, but please breathe *not one faint hint* of this to anyone. I am going disguised as 'Captain Campbell'! That will 'fetch' the highest circles!

Sir A. Wilson is coming here to stay on October 24. I am not going to tell him even, *so be silent!* (He has not rung his bell for his messenger for two months, so the Chaplain of the Fleet told my brother [Admiral Sir Frederic Fisher].)

Have you ever read *The Map of Life* by Lecky?[2] A wonderful book, though I don't agree with his politics. It contains the finest definition of a gentleman that I ever read, also a splendid eulogy of Cardinal Newman. When he had finished his job, he put the tools down and enjoyed himself with his God.[3]

I have just realized it's no use sending this to Venice, as no time, but it can wait arrival, and nothing like writing when your heart is full of affection!

My very best love to you both — now and for evermore!

Yours, F.

277: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING

[mid-October 1910]

Most Private and Confidential
Please burn when read.

My dear Edward,

I am very loth to reopen private and unhealed wounds, but your wonderful friendship and the affectionate tone of your letter both demand it of me. I tell you that it is absolutely impossible to accept even written assurances to the effect you indicate in your letter. *You are really being taken in* — you have no guarantees — I have many such assurances in my possession — but one and all of them have been ignored. There are men in this world who don't mean to be h'ass, but h'ass they are (*and d—d liars*) all the same! There are three

[1] Sir Hubert Herkomer, the celebrated portrait painter. 'Herkomer is such a real genius' (Fisher to Mrs. Cecil Fisher, June 9th, 1912).

[2] William E. H. Lecky, Irish historian and essayist (d. 1903), whose *The Map of Life* (1899) was a discussion of some of the ethical problems which arise in everyday life.

[3] 'HE [Newman] chose the right God. Others make roses or race-horses or rabbits their God, but the point is the same: "Undue prolongation of an active life is a grave misfortune" ' (Fisher to White, October 7th, 1910).

officers of high standing in the Navy whom I *knew* to be fools, and to be utterly unfit, but the very same appeal *in almost the very same words* was made to me as you are now making in your letter to me — 'to be magnanimous' — and against my convinced judgment, like a d—d idiot, I surrendered my convictions, and irreparable injury to the Navy (*and they each one of them bit the hand that fed them!*). It's not necessary to give you their names — they are *now* all three of them *by-words* in the Navy as retrograde fools, but had there been war while they were employed, I should have shot myself because of their disasters! No matter what is written, if the person you mention [Beresford] were retained on the active list (as you and Garvin suggest, for 5 years more), then in case of war the music halls would COMPEL you to put him in command of our fighting Fleet, and *certain disaster* would follow. *This is capable of exact proof.* You could not refuse to employ him, as it would be said, 'Why did you then specially promote him over another Admiral's head (Sir L. Beaumont), so as to keep him on the active list?'

You will live to repent bitterly giving your confidence to Sir G. Armstrong. He will betray you as he has betrayed me. There is very much more of a private character I could write to you which would make your blood boil, but I keep back that purely private part of the matter. Sufficient to say that malignant calumny in the man's own writing could go no further. Some day you shall read his letters. [Rest of letter missing.]

278: TO GERARD FIENNES

Kilverstone Hall
October 16th, 1910

Private

My beloved Fiennes,

Your kind letter very welcome! Cecil desperately in love, and she with him, and all is most suitable in all ways in her! Looks, age, character, and means, and I thank Heaven![1]

. . . I rather fancy that Sir George Armstrong of the *Globe* has got hold of Goulding, M.P., who is a bosom friend of Garvin's, and that some parleying with Beresford has been the consequence. This, however, is guesswork. . . .

Yours for evermore, Fisher

[1] Cecil Fisher married Miss Jane Morgan, of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, on November 22nd, 1910.

. . . Read page 303 of *Letters of English Seamen*, Chapman & Hall, just out.[1] A Bluejacket at Trafalgar writes to his mother. He describes the effect of Nelson's death:

> 'Chaps that fought like the devil, sit down and cry like a wench.'

What a magnificent epitaph! *Emotion* rules the world! The '*heart*,' not the '*brain*'! And reminds me of pages 130, 135, 136 of Stevenson's *Virginibus Puerisque* (the fine-paper edition of Chatto & Windus, 1905), Nelson at Copenhagen, and also the 4 marines of the *Wager*.[2]

> 'And mark you, undemonstrative men would have spoiled the situation. The finest action is the better for a bit of purple'!

There are d—d fools who call Nelson vain and theatrical! He swept the world with his big heart!

279: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
October 22nd, 1910

To be burnt

My dear Arnold White,

. . . Balfour has re-inflated the Beresford gas bag by lauding him as a great sailor![3] And how he could quote Beresford as to trade

[1] The complete title is *Letters of the English Seamen: 1587-1808*. E. Hallam Moorhouse was the author, and she had, with the Admiral's permission, dedicated the book to him. 'I am enchanted!' he had written her on October 11th, 'and though your book only came an hour ago I've read half of it!'

[2] The passage on Nelson at Copenhagen reads: 'Hear him again at Copenhagen: A shot through the mainmast knocked the splinters about; and he observed to one of his officers with a smile, "It is warm work, and this may be the last to any of us at any moment"; and then, stopping short at the gangway, added with emotion, "*But mark you – I would not be elsewhere for thousands*".' H.M.S. *Wager* was one of the ships that accompanied Anson on his famous voyage round the world in 1740-1744. It was wrecked off the southernmost coast of South America, and the ship's company set out in the boats in an attempt to reach Spanish settlements to the north. Two of the boats landed on a desolate and unknown island, where one was wrecked. The other not being able to accommodate all the survivors, four Royal Marines agreed to remain behind to fend for themselves, although they realized that they were being left to almost certain death. They were never heard of again. Wrote Stevenson: 'They were soldiers, they said, and knew well enough it was their business to die; and as their comrades pulled away, they stood upon the beach, gave three cheers, and cried "God bless the king!" '

[3] Balfour, in a speech at Glasgow, October 19th, on problems of imperial defence, had stated that Beresford 'has expressed publicly his views that there is but a very imperfect protection at present possible for our trade routes. He is probably, undoubtedly, the ablest sailor who has had command of a modern battleship, who in our experience has sat in the House of Commons, and who speaks, as I cannot pretend to speak, with the authority of one who has really dealt practically with the problems which Parliament and the country have to solve'.

protection being in danger is incomprehensible when he, Balfour, *knows* of Sir A. Wilson's evidence before the Beresford Committee refuting it *in toto! But be sure* you *never breathe a word of this*, and BURN THIS LETTER. Such is politics! And the very strange thing of all is that Balfour has written me an affectionate letter since his Glasgow speech! (We have a common bond in the submarine and the big gun!)

Heaven and earth is moving to make Beresford an Admiral of the Fleet! That rotund little cur, Sir George Armstrong, is very busy on it, and the King's name freely imported. (Kings like herrings are cheap to-day!) I am beseeched to move in the highest sphere. I can't. The environment is repugnant and second class. The new sympathies are not my sympathies, and I don't forget Birrell, M.P., telling me of Sir William Temple at Sheen.[1] But what a spectacle if a rank mutineer is honoured! But they are in fashion now, mutineers! and Sultans and Kings disappear quite easily.

Well, life is short and life is vain!

'La vie est vaine:
  Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de haine . . .
  Et puis — bon jour.

'La vie est brève:
  Un peu de joie,
Un peu de rêve . . .
  Et puis — bon soir.'[2]

Yours, F.

280: TO LIONEL YEXLEY

Kilverstone Hall
December 8th, 1910

Private and Confidential

My dear Yexley,

I have just returned from the United States and am absolutely ignorant of everything that has happened since I left on November 12, as I never had one single moment to read a newspaper, and

[1] Sir William Temple, the seventeenth-century statesman and author, was an enthusiastic fruit-grower at Sheen in periods of retirement from politics.

[2] From 'Peu de Chose et Presque Trop', by the late-nineteenth-century Belgian poet Léon van Montenaeken. However, the second line of the second stanza should read: 'Un peu d'espoir'.

indeed there is hardly any English news ever in the American papers, but I have just this moment heard by a pure accident that you are or have been *very ill*, and if it is true I send this line of sympathy and regret! I always think 'sympathy' is the greatest word in the world! Those d—d fools of parsons have translated the word wrongly and call it '*love*,' which in no way whatever describes the Bible meaning of the word as summed up in the parable of the Good Samaritan. (But I don't want to give you a sermon!)

I had a *wondrous* time in America. I am *immensely* impressed by the *magnitude* of the *men* and the *things* and the *ideas*, and I see before me a splendid propaganda, which I shall ask your help in by-and-by.

. . .

I believe I met many of the greatest men over there. About 50 in all rule the United States (as *6* rule the British Empire!). I had *tête-à-têtes* with them and they wanted me to stay over and raise the 'Middle West', as they call it! But I was obliged to be back for the Committee of Imperial Defence (which, believe me, is the Empire's salvation!). The most miraculous engine of power in America is their school system. Nationalities of every species pour in their thousands into the United States. Germans, Hebrews, Slavs in thousands and thousands, Irish, Poles, Italians, etc., etc., but in the second generation they are *all pure Americans* — their language English, their literature English, their traditions English, and, quite unconsciously to themselves, their *aspirations* are English! What d—d fools we shall be if we don't exploit this into a huge Federation of the English-speaking peoples! [President] Taft has sown the seed! *We want to water it!* This mighty school weapon of theirs reminds me of the Chicago sausage! It doesn't signify what species of pig goes in at one end of the machine — the same identically tasting sausage comes out at the other end and there is not the slightest flavour distinguishable of the original 'porcus'! Hundreds told me with unction (with German, Polish, and Hebrew names) that their mother's, grandmother's, sister's, aunt's, nephew's first cousin was English! *But wait till we meet!*

Yours truly, and hoping to hear you are on the mend,
Yours always,

Fisher

I lunched privately with about 90 [70] multi-millionaires, and they 'drew' me! I told them *it was a d—d fine old hen that hatched the American Eagle!* They all stood up and cheered like mad! Then I told them

Washington was the greatest *Englishman* that ever lived, as he taught us how to treat our children when they were grown up! They stood on the table at this! St. Peter's at Rome will go inside the Central Hall of the Pennsylvania Railway Station,[1] and there's a street in Philadelphia *12* miles long and *3* times the width of Regent Street, and houses both sides the whole way, and I never met one single beggar, and my son's father-in-law has a building as his sole office, and only with clerks in it, 40 stories high and as big ground space as Marshall & Snelgrove's, and express lifts by the dozen and travelling staircases to conserve the energy of the clerks!

281: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
Private [mid-December 1910]

My forlorn and devoted Pamela!

I do *really* feel for you not going to south of France with your Reggie, and your devotion and self-sacrifice is splendid to have urged him to go there. (Maybe come back like a giant refreshed!)

You have sent me a sweet letter, and it is burnt, as you must burn this, for both possess secrets. Napoleon B. is restless to get out of the War Office — said to be hankering again for the Admiralty, but it seems inconceivable that there will be any shuffling of places; but I mention it to you as having been seriously mentioned. I rather fancy something is piling up at the War Office in the way of deferred financial liabilities. Also I think there is some indiscipline amongst the subordinate Generals, who seem to prosper by being insubordinate. A man named Wilson, who succeeded Ewart,[2] is leading a crusade for compulsory service, when Haldane has written a preface against it. I also heard yesterday that Sir W. May is working the backstairs leading to the royal apartments to ensure himself succeeding "ard 'art,' and I think if I were Reggie I should almost be inclined to stick in Poë as First Sea Lord to sell May as he so richly deserves, besides his not being a man of war and being a sneak! Anyhow, I hope and

[1] '. . . and you can get a "papier mâché" transparent tumbler never touched by human hands by putting a penny in the slot, filled with doubly filtered iced water, guaranteed pure by the Pennsylvania Railway, and you never meet a beggar! When a man or woman begs, they deport them!' (Fisher to Remnant, December 9th, 1910).

[2] Brigadier-General (afterwards Field-Marshal, first Baronet) Henry H. Wilson had succeeded Major-General (afterwards Lieutenant-General Sir) John S. Ewart as Director of Military Operations, 1910-1914.

think the First Lord won't make any promises about him to anyone. I can fancy well the loss that Jellicoe is, but we have to remember that where he now is [C.-in-C., Atlantic Fleet] he practically will command the Fleet in war, as Bridgeman has the inestimable gift of realizing a better man than himself to put in the forefront of the battle.

F. E. Smith, Garvin, and Goulding are very busy over something and having meetings (burn this, be sure), and I shouldn't be the least surprised that Winston is assisting! and so maybe bringing in the Navy to be nationalized, as you mention. But it won't work. A Navy scare is the Tory sheet-anchor! at judicious intervals. That pestilent cad, Sir William White, is, I fancy, providing Winston with ammunition against the Navy Estimates. The First Lord will remember that Winston circulated a letter of White's to the Cabinet, and White, I'm told, has written again in the same sense. . . .

We are coming up to the Curzon Hotel on December 31 for six weeks and hope then to see you often. Such a dinner as you mention with Garvin would be quite perfection! I am a little afraid he is being got hold of by the Duchesses a bit about Beresford, but it's only hearsay. He writes to me as truly as ever. I am told that if Hemmerde had only had another fortnight at Portsmouth, he would have got in. He was first-rate and pulled down Beresford's majority by 2,000 as it was! I can't imagine the Prime Minister being got at about Beresford as regards Admiral of the Fleet without Reggie knowing of it. . . .

Always yours affectionately,

Jacky

282: TO COMMANDER THOMAS E. CREASE

Kilverstone Hall
December 17th, 1910

Private

My dear Crease,

How very interesting about the pamphlet![1] I remember writing it quite well — I was a Commander. I have no copy. Commodore

[1] Crease had been shown a pamphlet on 'Naval Tactics' recently discovered in the Admiralty Library. It had been written by Fisher in 1871, when a lieutenant on the China station, as a preface to a work on naval tactics which Captain (afterwards Commodore) James G. Goodenough had projected. 'It is especially interesting because all the developments of the 1904-10 era can be plainly seen as shadows in this pamphlet, and one could tell the author with certainty by the style' (Crease to Fisher, December 16th, 1910). See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 80, 338-9.

Goodenough circulated it all over the Navy without my knowledge and I lost my promotion by it — a 'd—d fellow who wanted to do away with masts and sails! a d—d youngster'. That's what the First Sea Lord [Sir Sidney Dacres] said! and all copies were ordered to be burnt. As if they could keep the world from turning on its axis! but Galileo had the same job with those persons, if you remember! . . .

Ever yours in haste,

F.

283: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Kilverstone Hall
December 20th, 1910

Private

My dear Arnold White,

. . . I enjoyed America immensely but overjoyed to be back.

> 'The heart untravelled fondly turns to home and drags at each remove a lengthening chain.'

But I shan't be surprised if I go over there to die! I had a wonderful welcome, and they seem to know me more than in my own land! (But the Scripture mentions that!) The magnitude of men, things, and ideas impressed me immensely. I think I saw all the great men and had fascinating *tête-à-têtes*. . . .

But their school apparatus is the wonder! Nationalities of all types pour into the country — Germans, Hebrews, Irish, Slavs now in thousands and thousands, and yet in the second generation they are all *pure Americans* . . . All sorts of unpronounceable names without a vowel came and *bragged* to me that their mother's grandmother's uncle's sister's aunt's cousin was English! We shall be d—d fools if we don't exploit this great fact for the peace of the world and the dominance of our race! a great English-speaking Federation, absolute independence of the units but a solid whole against the universe.

When I went from Pennsylvania into New Jersey, my motor car was stopped at the frontier to get a new label hung on it, and I could have had a divorce, if I wanted, just as easy as the new label!

They told me their population now is *100* millions, and yet only 25 persons to the square mile — Germany, 250, I think, and England, 550 about. They are going to be 250 millions! One d—d fool of a

Canadian told me Canada would rival the United States! *Canada hasn't the climate!* and they are only *8* millions. Why! the ship I came in from New York was laden with Canadian wheat — Canada frozen up — the St. Lawrence closed, while they are eating oranges in Florida!

70 multi-millionaires gave me a private lunch. They were enthusiastic and they asked me 'to raise the Middle West' (as they called it!), but *festina lente* and much judgment is wanted. I'm going to begin with Lord Morley[1] and Rosebery. I think it will come about. Germany and Japan are coalescing to exploit China and threaten the United States. No one mentions it any more than Gambetta mentioned revenge, but it is running like wild-fire through the American mind! Hence the plunge about fortifying the Panama Canal, dead in the face of our treaty against it. They know England is on their side, and Taft is sowing the seed for an English Entente, and the next President, Woodrow Wilson, Governor of New Jersey, whom I had a *tête-à-tête* with, is dead on![2] (*Burn this.*)

Yours always, F.

284: TO VAUGHAN NASH[3]

Kilverstone Hall
December 30th, 1910

Private

My dear Vaughan Nash,

Don't answer this letter. If the Prime Minister wants a successor as Canon of St. Paul's, *vice* Scott Holland, I suggest the Rev. Arthur Hart, Vicar of Deptford, a splendid preacher risen from the ranks, and an enthusiastic supporter of the Government, and he would wake up that nest of the Tories, the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's! The Archdeacon of London, Mr. Sinclair, knows all about Hart. Please see *Record* herewith, and I hope the Prime Minister will make Straton, Bishop of Newcastle, successor to Ryle at Winchester. All the Bishops except Hereford are Papists and Tories.[4]

Yours always, Fisher

[1] Morley had left the India Office and become Lord Privy Seal in November 1910 (-1914).

[2] Woodrow Wilson 'reminded me immensely of Abraham Lincoln in his laconic wisdom' (Fisher to Spender, December 28th, 1910).

[3] Vaughan Nash, private secretary to Asquith, 1908-1912.

[4] Fisher's recommendations regarding Hart and Straton bore no fruit. The Dean of St. Paul's, 1891-1911, was the Very Reverend Robert Gregory, and the Bishop of Hereford, 1895-1918, was the Right Reverend John Percival.

I have been in America and saw a great many people, and am deeply impressed by the universal deep desire to draw nearer to England, but Ireland blocks the way! And Home Rule all round is the necessity. But I would like to come and give you half an hour on the subject of what was said to me over there by *very influential people*. I am quite sure — *quite convinced* — that neither politicians nor newspaper men have any idea how widespread is the wish for a great English-speaking Federation that could compel the peace of the world and the dominance of our race. . . .

285: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
December 31st, 1910

'Much love and do write soon to your forlorn and devoted Pamela.'
So here goes!

You will see by the enclosed from Bridgeman (which you can send on to Nice) that he is very happy and he perfectly understands that his mission is to put Jellicoe in the forefront of the battle, like Uriah the Hittite, only not with the same result! When I see Reggie, I think I shall please him by all that passed between Bridgeman and myself as to the Battle of Armageddon!

I had wild telegrams and letters to spend two days with Garvin, Goulding & Co. next Monday in the country, but I am not going. They can stew in their own juice! Balfour is bound to win, for the one simple reason there is no one else! How Winston must d—n his own eyes now at not having remained with the Tories!

It is true what you hear of the 'gloom' at Sandringham. I know it at first hand. Do let us pray that the Prime Minister will be firm.[1] With all his immense qualities he is *not* a fighter, as you both well know to your cost in the anxieties and perils of the past. . . .

Toujours à toi,

F.

[1] This has to do with the pressure being put on Asquith by the King to make Beresford an Admiral of the Fleet. At an interview some time just before Christmas, the King 'begged hard that in February next C. Beresford might be made an Admiral of the Fleet – of course, on the understanding that his active career was at an end. I said that I had no personal objections – although it might be said that we were trying to buy his silence, which is not worth 5 minutes' purchase. But that I must consult you . . .' (Asquith to McKenna, December 26th, 1910; McKenna Papers). McKenna, in a letter to Asquith of about January 10th, 1911, effectively scotched the whole idea. See below, p. 350, n. 2.

286: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

The Athenaeum
Pall Mall, S. W.
January 10th, 1911

Private and Confidential

My beloved Jellicoe,

I wanted much to see you, as so difficult to put in a letter what transpired between myself and dear Bridgeman, who asked himself to stay with me the other day at Kilverstone and paid me a good visit. What I wish to convey to you is that he is prepared and wishes to lean wholly on you as regards war operations and gave me to understand he would be prepared so to manipulate matters as to put you in the forefront of the battle, but he hardly knows how far the Atlantic Fleet is going to work in unison with the Home Fleet. Whatever arrangements may be made at the Admiralty, it is both obvious and certain that when the actual conflict becomes imminent, all must rest with those on the spot. It is equally certain that the Atlantic Fleet will be then joined up with the Home Fleet, and to all intents and purposes an integral portion of it, hence it is vitally important that you and Bridgeman should be on the closest terms and discuss every eventuality, and the gravity of the case lies in the fact that hardly anyone but yourself — and this I pointed out to Bridgeman — clearly realizes the immense alteration in both tactics and strategy which the development of the submarine now causes. I am quite sure A. K. Wilson don't realize it, from our conversation together when he was last at Kilverstone. Of course I can't write down all that passed between Bridgeman and myself, but I assured him that he could confidently rely on you to be *all in all* with him as to war plans and any dispositions in regard to your own position, with the sole object of victory, and it would be perfectly easy for him so to manipulate the Home Fleet as to place you in command of the van and Bridgeman to come in and pick up the pieces. That was my advice to him and which he appeared to swallow, and my chief purpose in seeing you was to urge you to meet him more than half-way the very first time you get an opportunity of talking with him. . . .

Yours for ever,

Fisher

287: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Hotel Curzon
Curzon Street, W.
January 11th, 1911

Private

My dear Arnold White,

So sorry not to see you when you called, but I was closeted at No. 4 Carlton Gardens[1] and, strange to say, I am to-day to be at 10 Downing Street, but you know St. Paul gave thundering good advice when he said that to advance his great cause he was all things to all men!

And this is secret for your very own self — that to-night Garvin, McKenna, and I — we three — dine alone![2] and to-morrow with Lord Knollys. So you observe I am doing 'the mole' *in excelsis*!

I enclose you what the most powerful man in Congress says. As to Sims' reprimand,[3] it don't count, except it's a most valuable

[1] Balfour's residence. Balfour was so busy that Fisher had to content himself with a talk with his secretary, Sandars. 'The next morning . . . he referred to the project so much in your mind. He is a sceptic about German and Japanese designs on the American Continent; *but* he is as anxious as yourself for a complete 'entente' with the U.S.A. He has always been 'an American' . . . He has always dwelt upon the arguments of common origin, kinship, language, and sentiment. He never allows the expression "foreigner" or "foreign state" to be used in speaking of America or Americans' (Sandars to Fisher, January 13th, 1911).

[2] Fisher, fearing Garvin had 'ratted', had stopped writing to him. The dinner party completed the estrangement. Garvin wrote Sandars the next day: '. . . whether the dinner last night had any effect except for the worse upon the semi-estrangement between him [Fisher] and me, I don't know. I went determined to speak quite straight and took an early opportunity of saying that it would be a wise thing to close the feud in the Navy by making Beresford an Admiral of the Fleet. They were quite implacable however and I made no way at all. They said if he were promoted it would not be a purely honorific thing. He would have to be employed sometime in the next five years and that might mean national death. I said I totally disagreed, that the promotion could be made purely honorific by agreement between parties or by an understanding with Beresford himself. On the other hand, if he is debarred from what he covets, the legend of his martyrdom would be revived. Fisher and McKenna retorted that the feud would not be closed in any case but that the appointment to be Admiral of the Fleet, unemployed, would simply provide a basis for a new anti-Fisher campaign. My reply again was that while I think the technical policy of our present naval regime in many ways triumphant, I think it profoundly underestimates the importance of restoring the old solidity of national confidence in the Navy. There the thing remains, but, as you may imagine, it did not draw Fisher and me any closer, and I felt once more the thanklessness in a country cursed by political and personal partisanship of trying to be anything better than a partisan . . .' (Balfour Papers in the British Museum). Cf. below, p. 354. A letter to Garvin in October 1911 was the first Fisher had written to him in nearly a year.

[3] Commander (afterwards Rear-Admiral) William S. Sims, U.S.N., at a Guildhall lunch, December 3rd, 1910, had stated, as his own opinion, that if ever the integrity of the British Empire should be seriously threatened by any power, the English could count upon the assistance of 'every man, every ship, and every dollar' from their kinsmen across the Atlantic. Those present, and the English press, applauded the speech, but Sims was publicly reprimanded (January 13th, 1911) by President Taft for his tactlessness.

indication of the strength of deep feeling I observed universally of the United States drawing nearer to England. Patrick Ford[1] and the Germans HAVE to make a noise! and *so do empty barrels!* . . .

Yours for evermore,

F.

. . . Secret. Buckle wants me to see Sir E. Grey,[2] but Grey too fish-like to do any good!

288: TO A. G. GARDINER[3]

January 19th, 1911

Private

My dear Gardiner,

. . . *Secret.* I am more powerful now in the Committee of Defence than when I was First Sea Lord. I had masters then, now I have none and I have a platform. Probably if I made a speech in the House of Lords and said why I left the Committee on some vital principle, it would be efficacious, indeed it has been, but please burn this so soon as read.

I think they want eight millions sterling for compulsory service. If ever there was any the least doubt of the unassailable supremacy of the Navy, it would entice the Public to give it! The Public don't reason. It's not invasion, it's starvation that has to be contemplated. A British Army of 4 millions led by Moltkes instead of Asses no use if we have not command of the sea! The Germans would never land! Our bellies would compel surrender! But of course you knew all about this. What is the moral?

Give the Navy every d—d thing they want! Let there be no loop-hole for saying the Navy is short of anything and so we must have an Army! The poor idiots don't see that compulsory service means not, as they vainly imagine, the defence of their homes, but all being sent to the Vosges frontier to fight for France! Garvin says so, doesn't he? that we must have continental power, or words to that effect!

But I've been on another big thing. I've been to America. I had a wonderful reception from all classes. (I seem to be far better known there than in my own land.) I had illuminating *tête-à-têtes* with the most influential in the land, e.g., Woodrow Wilson, the next Presi-

[1] Patrick Ford, an Irish-American prominent in the cause of Irish nationalism.
[2] About an Anglo-American arbitration treaty.
[3] Alfred G. Gardiner, Editor of the Liberal *Daily News*, 1902-1919.

dent for sure. Harmon of Ohio is spoken of as his rival. Free Trade is coming along over there, but the real thing that is coming along is a great Federation of all the English-speaking people of the globe. There is a deep-seated desire to draw nearer to England. Politicians and journalists and diplomatists know nothing of it, but the great thing is coming and I am devoting all my heart to it. . . .

I gave Buckle of *The Times* 2 hours hot, and he put in a splendid article on arbitration. If we get rid of Roosevelt and Senator Lodge, it will all come along. Those two are bitter foes. But *this is secret, mind.* The American Senate is getting democratic and we shall get it. Three-quarters of a million Sunday School teachers in Great Britain with threefold that number in the United States, with millions upon millions of pupils, are on a concerted Sunday going to take home leaflets to their mothers ('The hand that rocks the cradle,' etc., etc.) on this great crusade. Sir Nathaniel Barnaby is working it for me, and I am working up all sorts of people.[1] I am probably going over to America to die. They asked me to come and 'raise the Middle West', as they called it!

And there is a momentous change coming in sea fighting which makes for it! Isn't Providence wonderful? *This is a deadly secret*, so burn and don't talk in your sleep! We have got a submarine that carries two 4-inch guns and goes 21 knots and can cross the Atlantic and wants no convoy and can live by herself for 2 months! *Do you see the outcome?* Our cousins across the Atlantic will say: 'By Jove!' we are safe from Japan invading Mexico (which General Homer Lea's book[2] has made them certain of!), and we are safe from Germany going to Brazil, which is an equally coming event (*so they think!*), but England will see us through with her hundred submarines she'll send over to help us. For invasion is a simple impossibility in the face of submarines! . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

[1] Sir Nathaniel Barnaby, onetime Director of Naval Construction (1872-1885), 'a great man, but he never had recognition. He was not self-assertive. He was as meek as Moses, and he was a saint . . . After he retired he devoted his whole life to Sunday schools . . .' (*Memories*, p. 255). 'Headings [of the leaflets]. "Peace on earth, good will towards all." "Community of interests the best treaty." "The dominance of our race is the liberty of the world" ' (Fisher to White, February 7th, 1911).

[2] *The Valour of Ignorance* (1909), by the American soldier Homer Lea, a warning to his countrymen against the ambitions of the Japanese Army.

289: TO REGINALD McKENNA

Kilverstone Hall
January 21st, 1911

Secret

My beloved First Lord,

My chief idea in forwarding the enclosed[1] is that I am convinced that it would be the case of the Suez Canal Shares over again if the Government bought this huge British oil supply! Take my word for it that old Marcus don't give a million sterling for 'a pig in a poke'! I firmly believe he is solely patriotic in this matter, for *I know* he has five millions sterling of his own, so don't want for money. Perhaps you'll say, 'I'll keep clear of the whole business'! This is what I wrote and told him, and which letter you'll see he has torn up. So please don't feel under any obligation to respond to him. In any case I would not be present, or invite him to meet you. Nor do I much care to be a Director, as he suggests. I've got just enough to live on, and Cecil will always lend me a five-pound note! But for the good of the Country I think Marcus should write a letter to you to ask for a confidential interview with you and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister, to state his case, *which is overwhelming*. That would keep you quite clear, and not to mention me at all in the matter. Some official representative would probably be preferable.

Yours for ever,

Fisher

I think it's a wonderful chance for the Government! As Marcus says, the case for the Government is, '*Heads, I win — tails, you lose*'!

[1] A letter to Fisher (January 20th) from Sir Marcus Samuel, first Baronet (afterwards first Viscount Bearsted), head of the Shell Transport and Trading Company, a large Anglo-Dutch oil-producing, refining, and distributing organization. Samuel and associates had set up a company to exploit the Sarawak (Borneo) oil-fields. He was its chairman and he was inviting the Government to appoint a director – Fisher by preference – to represent it, 'to watch and report to them [the Government] the production of the field, and to secure to the British Navy the right of pre-emption of the fuel on fair terms to be arranged'. The Government showed no great interest in Samuel's overture.

290: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING

Kilverstone Hall
January 28th, 1911

Private. Please burn when read.
My beloved Edward,

With your busy life to write me such a long letter was very sweet of you, and I do very greatly appreciate all you wrote to me, but nothing will quell the malignant spite that even now daily exerts itself against me, though I absolutely take no notice and *never have!* The fact is, if I were to make public what goes on, it would make those in very high places feel a public storm of bad effects on their popularity, which might have awkward results, but please burn this. I only say it to you as an affectionate friend in whom I can trust and to demonstrate to you that it is quite useless to forgive and impossible to forget. The slights put upon me are mean in the extreme, but I absolutely take no notice, but the fate of Rehoboam taking the advice of the friends of his youth is assuredly impending. It's going to be a bad day when the 'King don't count' and a second-class entourage 'run the show' and wear out the backstairs carpet! . . . Lord Knollys has asked me three times to meet the 'Old Guard' who surrounded that beloved friend who departed in glory on May 6th last, but I have purposely refused. I don't want any demonstration. Also it only serves to accentuate what is desirable to minimize, that d—d young fools instead of wise old men are playing Hell with the monarchical halo which a great King left as a great heritage. . . .

I believe I am to be succeeded as Principal Aide-de-Camp by one whose sole object is to damn all I've done and who cut me at the King's funeral (biting the hand that fed him!), and whom I saved from a great scandal.[1] *You always hate most the man you have wronged most!* I have not said a word of all this to anyone but you — not to Garvin even. He dined with McKenna and myself, but I was silent all the time. I don't doubt him any more than I doubt you, but he has made a mess of it about Beresford, and silence is the best thing between friends. Next January I am going to emerge again, God helping. Till then I am going into 'Retreat,' I think it is called by holy men! . . .

Yours for evermore,

F.

[1] Admiral Sir Lewis Beaumont succeeded Fisher as First and Principal Naval A.D.C. to the King, 1911.

291: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Private. Please burn. January 31st, 1911

My dear Arnold White,

You never said anything more to the point when stating that always some fool, zealot, or traitor gives us away to foreigners! A zealot did this lately in [the case of] the *Lion*. The Germans were absolutely unconscious of the magnificence of our new 13½-inch gun or of the 70,000 horsepower. Beresford said (or someone said it for him) that a German Admiral had told him he knew all about it. Observe the lie! Is it conceivable that the German Government would have let the Austrians lay down obsolete Dreadnoughts at Trieste, had they known the *Lion*? Not only that, but a friend staying here with a foreign wife told me her German nephew employed in Krupp's Works had said the *Lion* was a revelation to them, and at that time they possessed no bigger gun than the 12-inch. But our bloody fool of a zealot gives us away! So we lost all the advantage of what had been, so far, a wonderful secret. I only hope our submarine secrets may not get out. The Germans and others have several more to go to the bottom before they reach our present position, if they don't learn secrets.

In haste, Yours, F.

The one absorbing anxiety is, shall we go ahead as we ought to in the development of submarines and internal-combustion propulsion! *These are the two burning naval questions of the day*; all the rest, ROT! BURN THIS.

You wrote splendidly as to utter folly of a loan — deadly to development in fighting power in new designs.

292: TO JOHN LEYLAND

Kilverstone Hall
February 1st, 1911

Private

My dear Leyland,

I sent you a telegram of thanks for your much valued letter, as I did not know when I should be able to answer it! I have been quite overwhelmed by letters and telegrams from all sorts and conditions of men and have not even yet answered them all, and spent a fortune

in telegrams! It's quite inexplicable to me, as I thought after this year of complete seclusion that my burial last Wednesday would have been like Sir John Moore's 'Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note', etc.[1] I think *The Times* was about the only newspaper that did not notice it (amongst the respectable ones, I mean!). The provincial Press quite extraordinary, and as a violent friend wrote to me of *The Times*, 'pages put in about Minto,[2] who only was a voice tube', but what does it all signify? Nothing! My sun really set on May 6th last, when the greatest friend I ever had went to his zenith. I have never got over it. There was no more he could do for me, but my loss was irreparable, as a private friend.

McKenna came straight here from Windsor Lodge to spend my birthday with me. A great surprise! He had arranged it with my son and I never knew of it till I saw him! and this the man who on succeeding Tweedmouth was expected to kick me out! He found the Court atmosphere that of Rehoboam and the young bloods gave him the cold shoulder! (*Burn this.*) And yet if ever there was a patriot, it is he! Twice has he given all his political life for the Navy. McKenna was delighted by the King's tutor Hansell, who has watched Osborne and Dartmouth with a microscope for four years, spontaneously saying with enthusiasm that 'no education like it in the world!'

Again my deepest heartfelt thanks to you, my dear Leyland, for your steadfast and never failing help.

Yours for evermore, Fisher

293: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Hôtel Metropole
Pallanza, Lago di Maggiore
February 23rd, 1911

My beloved First Lord,

. . . Two excellent stories of Bayly[3] have reached me since I saw you. They must be *ben trovato*, I think, yet are vouched for! A

[1] The first lines from Charles Wolfe's (early-nineteenth-century Irish clergyman and poet) famous 'The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna' (1817). Moore commanded the English troops in the Peninsular campaign, 1808-1809.

[2] A *Times* leader of December 12th, 1910, had been fulsome in its praise of the viceroyalty of India, 1905-1910, of the fourth Earl of Minto, who had just returned to England.

[3] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Lewis Bayly, then terminating his appointment as President of the War College, 1908-1911.

'Great Personage', when at Portsmouth, said sneeringly to Bayly (which provoked his reply), 'Oh! you're a great friend of Lord Fisher's!' 'Yes, Sir, I am proud of it, and when you and I are *both of us* forgotten, his memory will still live!' The other story quite recently at the Naval Club, Portsmouth. Bayly heard Captain Campbell holding forth to a lot of young Lieutenants as to May's inefficiency, and went up to Campbell as follows: 'We are all in plain clothes here now, but I will call on you at 10 a.m. to-morrow on board the *Hindustan* officially, and tell you what a cad you are to run down your Commander-in-Chief to these young officers!' Campbell turned green and collapsed. The beauty of it is that Bayly despises May himself. I think it's providential your putting May to Devonport, as if you don't take him as First Sea Lord, he will be provided for. In view of what you told me of your engagements to Lloyd George, it may be that Poë will be more suitable, but you have plenty of time to consider this[1]. . . .

Yours affectionately,

Fisher

294: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Pallanza
February 23rd, 1911

Private

My beloved Friend,

I wish you would not trouble yourself to fight for me as you do! It's no good. '*They hate me the more*' (like his brethren did Joseph) because the d—d dreams come true! *Resurgam!* I am buried for a year. Wait and see. But in the tomb I'm not wasting time. But certainly it is curious how persistently and unceasingly my enemies pursue me; and Esher, the day I left England, gave me a lurid illustration of this malignant and even ferocious spite! and yet I have been a whole year away in the wilds of Norfolk. Nine days supposed to be enough to be forgotten! *I can't make it out!* I believe the secret is I have such splendid friends — if you see the paradox. . . .

Yours for evermore,

F.

[1] Bridgeman succeeded May as Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet on March 25th, with May becoming Commander-in-Chief at Devonport in April. This was May's last command. On his retirement in March 1913, he was promoted to Admiral of the Fleet. Poë stayed on as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet until June 1912.

295: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Pallanza
February 25th, 1911

Dear Angel,

This is a truly heavenly place, but perhaps you've been here! Continuous sun, delicious soft water to wash in — comes from somewhere in the mountains — avenues of magnolia trees and camelias in flower, bamboos luxuriant, and all sorts of tropical trees, large mimosa trees in flower, and temperature 64° in the shade in the day, and a splendid cook here, and a very clean hotel and the best of Beal's beds! What more can one want? YOU!!! I really am astonished more people don't come here, but the gain is ours. The journey so splendid from London, too — no change of carriage from Calais, and in 22½ hours. . . .

I have just got a pressing invitation from a lovely American to go to Rome (she has just refused the Duc de Gramont, as she thought him a bit too old!), but it's so pleasant here I'm not going to move. Moreover, I want to digest a lot of notes I have, and so wish to be a hermit. . . .

I think the Parliament Bill ought to take the fire off the Navy Estimates. What so puzzles me is how the Army Estimates entirely escape public attention, when without any doubt whatever they ought to be reduced by millions and millions! How does Napoleon B. manage it?

I wish I knew what Lloyd George talked to Rufus Isaacs about concerning me; but this was some time ago — about January 2 — when they came back together from the Riviera.

You ought to get Esher to come to lunch sometimes, as he always knows everything, and is a staunch admirer of your R., and so would tell you things. How the Tories must now be sorry they ever drew attention to the fact that we had lived for 20 years under a single-chamber Government!

I wish you were both here in this sun.

Yours affectionately,

F.

296: TO J. A. SPENDER

Pallanza
February 27th, 1911

My dear Spender,

How very kind of you to ask me to dinner to meet the Prime Minister! But had I been there, no one would have got a word in edgeways! Do you remember Winston dying to say a word and *he couldn't get in* — the day I lunched with you? . . .

I regret to see the Army Estimates practically gone up a quarter of a million sterling (if not more!). It's an awful error! The Territorial Force is far more than sufficient as it is! Every penny unnecessarily spent on the Army means 2 pennies taken from the Navy, and much more than that, because the more unassailable you make the supremacy of the Navy, the more you dish old Roberts and all his gang! *I know as an absolute fact* that the whole War Office is permeated and saturated with the idea of our being in collision with Continental armies on their own ground. General Wilson, the Director of Military Operations, preaches this doctrine day and night, and it is a most alarming thing that it should have been stated in the French Chambers recently that the English and French War Offices are in continuous talk on this point. The English people would rise as one man against our Army being sent into Flanders!

Please burn this letter and don't mention me, as I spoke perhaps too strongly when this idea was mooted not long since, but anyhow it got its quietus in consequence. It is now rising again. The subordinate Generals of the War Office are all insubordinate.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

The Principles of National Defence[1]

I An Ocean Fleet
II An Invasion Fleet
III A seagoing Army
IV A stay-at-home Army

The odd numbers work together, and so do the even!

I Licks creation.
III is a projectile to be fired by the Navy.
II never leaves our shores. Submarines, etc.
IV is to comfort the old women of both sexes!

[1] He had just found this note, which he altered slightly, among his old Mediterranean papers.

297: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Pallanza
March 6th, 1911

Guardian Angel,

. . . SECRET, *and burn.* It just strikes me that Hedworth Williamson would be splendid for Barbara! I *know* he has *£370,000* in solid gold left him by his father, and I consider him the most agreeable fellow in the world. He lived with me a whole year when I was Admiral in the *Renown* in the Mediterranean, so I know him. Mrs. George Keppel, who was brought up with him, and his bosom friend, made sure he was going to marry Dorothy [Fisher], but she wouldn't have him! Burn this! But they are great friends still, which is why he has offered himself to come to us now. For goodness sake, don't mention all this, and *burn*, but he really is perfectly charming, and King Edward used to think the same. Of course I don't know yet if he will come to Florence, as he was set on Venice, where he has a regular coterie! But I'll tell you before long whether he comes or not.[1]

I have no doubt at all that Reggie will be taken to the top of an 'exceeding high mountain' and offered all sorts of bribes to give Lambton Portsmouth, but I feel sure he will say, '*Vade retro, Satanas!*' for it would so especially suit Bridgeman (plus Jellicoe), being the head man at sea, for Poë to go now at once to Portsmouth.[2] However, I am wasting ink and your time in writing all this, as everything will be fixed up before you get this letter! Anyhow, I hope that backstairs cad Berkeley Milne won't get either the Mediterranean or Chatham![3] He was Beresford's chief witness, but when the sneak saw the case was going against him, he declined to give evidence! But there's another story too revolting to write, which I will tell you about him at Florence. (*What a time some of these pimps will have at the Day of Judgment!!!*) But no more on these nauseous subjects!

You say to me in this letter just come, 'Don't be a hermit for too long'! Well! two days ago I got a spontaneous letter from Admiral

[1] Alas! Nothing came of Fisher's venture in matchmaking. In July Barbara married the Hon. Francis McLaren, younger son of the first Lord Aberconway, who was killed flying in 1917. She married Bernard (afterwards first Baron) Freyberg in 1922. Sir Hedworth Williamson, ninth Baronet (and 'a deep-seated Radical!' thought Fisher), remained a bachelor. 'I am so glad about dear Barbara! Give her my BEST love, please (and a kiss!!!). Awful sell for me. I've just arranged for Sir Hedworth Williamson to be here to meet her . . . *So that's all off.* Such is life – "*one damned thing after another*"! So the Yankee said to me!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, April 23rd, 1911).

[2] Curzon-Howe, holding the Portsmouth command, had suddenly died. He was replaced by Admiral Sir Arthur Moore.

[3] But Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Berkeley Milne, second Baronet, succeeded Poë in the Mediterranean, 1912-1914. It was his first appointment since August 1910.

Bayly, late head of War College at Portsmouth — he has a splendid brain (as R. will tell you), and he writes to me that I never did a wiser thing in all my life than coming utterly away, as I have now done for a whole year, or more, without returning to England, as he says the effect is excellent in making it so absolutely clear that all things are going so splendidly, as they are going on their own merits and solely instigated by R.'s own convictions and those near him! And Bayly gives me a bit of poetry I don't recognize (you of course will!) —

> 'Who does the best his circumstances allow
> Does well, acts nobly, angels could do no more.'

And finishes his letter by reminding me that though David complained bitterly in the Psalms of those who attacked him, yet he always concludes with the satisfactory remark that they are ungodly, and will fall into the pit that they have dug for him!

It's simply lovely your talking of '*the boys*'!!![1] You certainly are splendid as a fruitful vine! *Heaven prosper you with your olive branches!* I'm sure you'll bring them up gloriously! I was fascinated long ago by a mother who never said '*Don't*' to any of her children — she was always telling them *what they might do* and making all things right very attractive to them, whereas the ordinary d—d fool of a mother or nurse or governess says, '*Don't* do this, *don't* do that,' and so on *ad infinitum*. Why! it puts the very idea of doing it into their little heads to do it when you tell them *that they ought not to do it!* I say it with all reverence, but I think it was a mistake mentioning that apple tree to Eve — the very first thing she did was to go and look at it, and then, of course, when you look, you're done for!!! . . .

Yours,

F.

298: TO GERARD FIENNES

Pallanza
March 9th, 1911

Private and Confidential

My beloved Fiennes,

. . . As I think I've told you, the one absorbing object of my life now is the British-American Union, and I am working hard (*but like a mole!*). The Japan Alliance has almost as much bearing on it as Home Rule for Ireland and Canadian Reciprocity with the United

[1] David McKenna had been born on February 16th, 1911.

States. ALL THREE ARE IMMENSELY on the side of the object of my life! If there is a Democratic President, as I feel sure there will be, then the victory is won! It doesn't much matter which of the three is President — Woodrow Wilson or Governor Harmon or [Speaker] Champ Clark! The first the best. He is an educated Abraham Lincoln, with a Von Moltke brain, and doesn't care a d—n if he is sure he's right. I had a *tête-à-tête* dinner with him and we swore friends!

But this is quite apart from the question whether the Japanese Alliance is right in itself. *It is not.* Lots of things ain't right, but 'a sprat to catch a mackerel'! . . .

Yours evermore,

F.

299: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Pallanza
March 9th, 1911

Private and Confidential
My dear Arnold White,

. . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

. . . I would like to ask you if you don't think it would be a good thing to have a robust boatswain's mate with a cat-o-nine tails to give the following scoundrel 4 dozen?[1] What's the good of 'Garden Cities' when this sort of thing goes on? We want the '*unwritten law*' over here, as they have it in the United States! That woman ought to be able to shoot her husband and get 5 shillings a week for doing it!

I am getting on beautifully with my British-American Union! But don't say anything of it, please. I find 'the MOLE' system answering splendidly. Strange to say, all sorts of 'big things' are playing into my hands! It's wonderful! It doesn't much matter which of the three is next President to satisfy my book — Woodrow Wilson, Governor Harmon, or Champ Clarke! But we mustn't hustle Providence! Rebekah was a d—d fool! Jacob would have had it all the same without her hustling him!

[1] Attached to the letter was this *Daily Telegraph* cutting of March 7th, 1911: 'A witness at Willesden Police-court yesterday told the magistrate that the brokers had just seized her fourth home within a year, owing to her husband's laziness. He was now occupying the only bed left by the bailiffs, and refused to get up.'

300: TO A. G. GARDINER

Pallanza
March 18th, 1911

Private

My dear Gardiner,

You see the British-American Union is getting along! Sir E. Grey has spoken well![1] I forget if I told you I had a long *tête-à-tête* with Buckle (the Editor of *The Times*) on the subject. He counselled me to see Grey. I refused. Neither the present Cabinet nor the last Cabinet treated me fairly. *I may say they both treated me damnably!* But I leave that story in words which I have written (*which will live hereafter!*) of how political feelings lead honourable men into dishonour of the most despicable description, and, as Esher wrote to King Edward at the time, made one sick of the paltry cowardice of really great men. But then think of the great Bacon! 'The wisest, greatest, meanest of mankind.'

However, this is all an unintentional digression. I think Buckle saw Sir E. Grey. Anyhow he put in two days afterwards a splendid — *really excellent* — leading article in *The Times* on arbitration, which did great service on the other side of the Atlantic. (Good old Buckle! beggar as he is for sitting on the fence!) So the torch is lit and we shall have the bonfires on the hills in due course.

> 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.'

(*Vide* Isaiah, Chapter LII, verse 7.) And now suddenly I am led to ask your advice, which is strange! as one of the guiding principles of my life has been '*Never ask advice*'! It's dead against the Nelsonic spirit! You know in the Nelsonic attributes that comes first:—

I. *Self-Reliance.*
II. Fearlessness of Responsibility.
III. Fertility of Resource.
IV. Power of Initiative.

My blessed and ever-mourned great friend, King Edward, used to blackguard me for never being guided, and used to call me 'd—d obstinate'. I replied, 'No, Sir, only firm'! 'Firm in my own faith.'

[1] Grey had, in the House of Commons on March 13th, taken advantage of a discussion upon British armaments expenditure to welcome references by President Taft (March, December 1910) to the ideal of Anglo-American arbitration, which, said Grey, would reduce such expenditure to moderate dimensions.

Fancy if Nelson had taken advice before the Battle of the Nile! He saw the tips only of the masts of the French Fleet at sunset, and had no charts of the anchorage it was at in Aboukir Bay — full of shoals! His answer was a signal to his Fleet, 'Make all possible sail', when all entreated him to wait for next morning, and the French Admiral writes to his wife, 'We saw Nelson at sunset; half our crews were ashore; we never expected him that night, but the d—d fellow came'. (Read *The Crescent and the Cross* by [Eliot] Warburton [1845]. That will stir your blood — his account of the Nile!)

Well, that's another digression! which please excuse! I love my pen (like my mind) to be fancy-free! I think the reason I suddenly ask for your advice is that not only are you a man of the world, which King Edward said I was not, and never would be! — 'that I had gone all round the world but I had never been in it'! (which was rather nasty of him!) — but you are also a man of literature, and that I am not either! I fancy I told you that one eminent publisher, whose confidence I must respect, and not give you his name, offered me a cheque for 1,000 guineas as a sort of retainer to write my life, with as much more to follow as I liked to arrange in the way of the profits, which he seemed to think would be great. Three others also have written. For the time I declined them all. For a month now I've been looking at my past and I've been thinking, won't all this — *so enormously captivating now* — fall very flat later on? So tremendously in the centre of things since Lord Ripon[1] made me Director of Naval Ordnance in 1886! And then I had the audacity to fight the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, soon after and win — he was rude indeed — but Athanasius was right! and the world of Toryism had to give in. I can only tell you it was David and Goliath! I am awfully sorry to be egotistical, but I only had the smooth pebble of truth to fling at him, and it hit him right between the eyes! And dashed if he didn't, years after, when I was Commander-in-Chief in North America, go to Queen Victoria and say, 'We'll have Fisher, Madam, at the Hague Conference'! and never asked Goschen or anyone! Now supposing I was to write my life, isn't Sir George Reid right, who said to me, 'It's only a d—d fool who writes his own life'? You can't see yourself like another man can! *Nor how can you say the things!* Do you think, for instance, I could say this:—

A Great Personage (sneeringly), 'Oh! you're a great friend of Lord Fisher's!'

[1] The first Marquess of Ripon, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1886.

One of our very smartest Admirals: 'Yes, Sir, I am proud of it, and when you and I are *both of us* quite forgotten, he will live!'

Could I write this, that it was I told King Edward I had ravished every virgin in London! And how he simply thought it splendid, if true! Could I put in what my memory always carries, what a lovely woman sent me, who had heard me called a devil?

'The Best have a touch of the Devil
The worst have a taste of the Saint.
Mother Nature is Queen of all Artists
Only God can see under the paint.'

Which reminds me that Robertson of Brighton,[1] the greatest preacher since Solomon, truly said that a great saint must have all the capabilities of a great sinner. Of course he got that from Mary Magdalene — she had seven devils, if you remember — *vide* Luke, Chapter VIII, verse 2 (I am supposed to have SEVENTY!!!). And it is most gratifying to reflect upon that wherever the Christian gospel is preached in the Universe it is directed that Mary Magdalene is always to be mentioned, and yet she had been 'a woman on the streets'!

> 'Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying: "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him; for she is a sinner." '[2]

But what would you do? Wouldn't it be emasculation to leave out a huge mass of these truthful, biting episodes? Wouldn't there be endless libel actions if left in? But if left behind for after ages, wouldn't Noah's Diary be more interesting?[3]

Yours always,

Fisher

Whenever you write to me, and there's no hurry, please always address: Kilverstone Hall, Thetford, Norfolk, *Private*, *Please forward*, as I am off to Florence now, but don't know my address there. It's

[1] Frederick W. Robertson, incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton, 1847-1853.

[2] Luke vii, 39.

[3] Gardiner replied on March 24th: '. . . you certainly ought to write your autobiography. Not to do so would be to deprive the world of one of the most entertaining books I can imagine.' To preserve the 'energy and individuality' of his style, he recommended that Fisher write the book 'with absolute frankness and fulness', without an 'eye on all the restraints which publication involves', then have the manuscript read by 'some thoroughly judicious person' who would suggest modifications or deletions.

an odd change in my life! The true wisdom, as a great man said, is *to be always seasonable!* And to change with a good grace with changing circumstances! To love playthings well as a child, to lead an adventurous and honourable youth, and to settle when the time arrives into a green and smiling age, is to be a good artist in life and deserve well of yourself and your neighbour. Also supposing I put into the book of my life what Lloyd George said to me recently: 'It is a fact that you and you alone are the man who has done away with the House of Lords.' What a storm! *but it is the truth!* By the way, a friend writes to me yesterday that Garvin, who swore to me he would never leave me or forsake me, has in his last week's *Observer* thrown in his lot with Beresford, whom he correctly described as quite true in times past as a fraud. I wonder at Garvin, but I think it is Dryden who says:—

> 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their walls [bounds] divide.'[1]

You once accurately described Beresford as a Jack-in-the-Box! No matter how much he is discredited, his vanity is impervious! And he passes judgment on Sir Arthur Wilson,[2] whose shoes he is not fit to black. He used to black them, now he blacks Wilson's character.

P.S. I never can ever read over anything I have written, but I expect I've sent you a curious mixture of grave and gay!

[Postscript on envelope] See St. Mark, Chapter XIV, verse 9, as my authority:—

> 'Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the [whole] world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.'

301: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Hotel Berchielli Frères
Florence
April 15th, 1911

Private. Please burn.

My dear Friend,

. . . having had several days of my late chief's company here, I am able to say to you that it is all *precisely* as I wrote to you, and that it

[1] A translation of a Latin proverb, from Dryden: 'Absolom and Achitophel' (1681).

[2] A. K. Wilson had reaffirmed Admiralty views on invasion in a short appendix to the second edition of Lieutenant-General (afterwards General) Sir Ian Hamilton's book, *Compulsory Service* (January 1911). On March 13th, in the House of Commons, Beresford said that he had never in his life read such a thing as the First Sea Lord's memorandum.

THE HERKOMER PORTRAIT, 1911

would be simply silly of me to return to England to knock the bottom out of an empty bomb that can't explode. NO! The danger is an organized attack to get McKenna 'knocked out'! *Extremes have met!* Socialists and Tories from widely different motives want to get him out of it! BUT THEY WON'T! They made sure they had him on the Archer-Shee case! He is stronger than ever because of it! *You* CAN'T *do a man a greater service than to attack him unsuccessfully!*

I'll be back all right in 1912! My PROPER date is October 21, 1912, but I've compromised with McKenna and made it Lady Day [March 25th] and hope the Blessed Virgin will be as propitious as Saint Horatio [Nelson]; but I doubt it (I HATE that d—d word '*compromise*'!!!).

Some of the notes I find myself making are so truly delicious that I am solely tempted to follow your advice:

> 'There's a chiel amongst you taking notes
> And, faith, he'll prent them!'[1]

But what about the libel actions!!!

Yours for evermore

F.

An Anglo-Israelitish Providence has arranged that *130,000* men will do for our Empire what it takes FOUR MILLIONS of men to do for Germany. An *unassailable frontier* — and these d—d military fools don't see it! We have heaps of money, but few men, our enemies heaps of men and no money (compared with us).

Please write and tell me you have burnt this letter and will tell no one of its contents. Mind you tell me your honest opinion of my picture in the Academy, as my family have gone mad on it, and so has Herkomer himself![2]

[1] From Bobby Burns: 'On the late Captain Grose's Peregrinations thro' Scotland' (1789). The correct version is:

> A chield's [fellow's] amang you taking notes,
> And, faith, he'll prent [print] it.

[2] The original of the Herkomer portrait (68″ × 47″) was given to the National Portrait Gallery in 1936 by the second Lord Fisher at the urgent request of Lord Duveen. Copies of the original hang in Kilverstone Hall, the United Service Club, and Admiralty House, Portsmouth. '. . . everyone says it's Herkomer's masterpiece, and he said it to me himself. And all the more because I believe he never altered a single brush of paint that he put on, and did it all in 4 sittings! So it's a sort of record picture!' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, September 1st, 1918).

302: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Grand Canal Hotel
Venice
May 4th, 1911

N.B. YOU ARE TO BURN THIS LETTER!

My beloved Angel,

You are a 'sweet' to arrange for Cecil and Co. in *Enchantress. Bless you both!* Also I am delighted the picture satisfies you. I heard from a good source that Mrs. Asquith at once spotted the virtues of the picture when she went into the Academy, so I wrote her an appreciative letter, and more especially as my daughter's husband [Rear-Admiral (ret.) Reginald R. Neeld] is a rugged Tory, and is correspondingly rude when the Asquiths are his neighbours at Easton Grey, which is inhabited by my great friend of old times, Mrs. Graham Smith. That's a long story to explain to you why I have written to Mrs. Asquith. (I added a little political advice at the end!) If the Prime Minister at all plays up to the Tories, he will ruin his Party. He seems to me to have a tendency that way. *Now mind you burn this letter.*

I have had a long yarn from Esher full of the inside of things. He has been staying a fortnight at Windsor Castle!!! *He really is wonderful.* He says he '*feels as if he were staying at a quiet vicarage*'! Don't you think that's lovely? But the gist of the letter is that if the Prime Minister is *absolutely firm* [on the Parliament Bill] and doesn't pander in any way to the Opposition, and hangs on till January 1916, then he will ensure his Party remaining in power till *1926*! (There's prophecy for you as good as Isaiah!) Be very careful not to quote me or Esher. It would spoil your secret Intelligence Department. Esher writes a whole lot about the Military Conspiracy to raise the Army Estimates, and the Generals on the Committee of Imperial Defence all being banded to depreciate the Navy, but he adds quite conclusively, '*The country will never stand it*', but Lord Viscount Napoleon B. is so extremely artful (*just for the sake of being artful!*) that one does not know what mischief might not be done, when you consider how glad both L. G. and Winston might be to give your dear Reggie a fall! But, as Esher adds, the Prime Minister is absolutely all-powerful and he has the whole game completely in his own hands, and so I wrote to Mrs. Asquith.

Yours for evermore,

F.

303: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Venice
May 9th, 1911

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

. . . McKenna much shaken by that operation; he gets tired very soon — but he is still 'A FIGHTER' all right! God bless him! I was loth to urge him to do things which *I know* I could carry through *triumphantly* had I been still First Sea Lord, and I told him he MUST stick close to Wilson. McKenna pressed me vehemently to come home, and so have others of great importance, BUT I WON'T! When Wilson goes, RESURGAM! Till then it would be fatal for me to get between him and the limelight!

I think Briggs is timid and old Watts wanting to clear out. If so, I hope you'll recommend BILES to McKenna.[1] Please do so when next you write. I don't know any better man.

The King had Ottley to see him and vehemently abused the Dreadnought to him and praised the 'King Edward' type!!! Also the Elder Brethren put McKenna's name forward to be made an Elder Brother, as always customary, and when the Duke of Connaught, as Master of the Trinity House, took it to the King, the King scratched out McKenna's name and inserted Lord Crewe's name![2] *So you see how the wind blows!* But McKenna is looking up again in the Cabinet! and Lloyd George has embraced him and dined him and breakfasted Mrs. McKenna.

I've written a nice letter to Lloyd George. For some occult reason he now loves me!!! You remember how different at that Cabinet Committee Meeting at the House of Commons! The last yarn is that I am to take McKenna's place when he goes Chancellor of the Exchequer, but where Lloyd George is going I wasn't told!!! I can't

[1] John (afterwards Sir John) H. Biles, consulting naval architect and professor of naval architecture at Glasgow University, 1891-1921, who had served on various Admiralty committees. Biles did not succeed Watts as Director of Naval Construction when the latter retired in 1912.

[2] Trinity House, founded by Henry VIII in 1514, has varied functions, including the disbursement of pensions and bounties to distressed seamen and their widows. The Elder Brethren consist of members of the royal family, statesmen, retired naval officers of high rank, and commanders in the mercantile marine. The Master at this time was King Edward's brother, Field-Marshal the first Duke of Connaught and Strathearn. Crewe was Secretary of State for India, 1910-1915. Fisher later noted on a letter from McKenna of May 20th, which told of the Deputy Master of the Trinity House (H. A. Blake, Captain, R.N.R., ret.) paying a visit to the Admiralty to explain what had happened: 'The episode was about the dirtiest underhand trick ever played by King George, and I threatened the Trinity House with exposure unless all was made plain to McKenna.' See below, p. 373.

get out of Rufus Isaacs what Lloyd George said to him about me, and he is not a fellow you can make drunk like Uriah the Hittite!

Heaven bless you both.

Yours always, Fisher

Postscript. This place Venice is IDEAL! *Noise*-less, *dust*-less, *motor*-less, *horse*-less, *dog*-less (and therefore *dung*-less!), and only *one* perambulator in all Venice! 72° in the shade! (probably they've got their skates on in England!), and a lovely terrace on the Grand Canal! I am busy writing episodes of my life! I must find some woman to edit my memoirs! No man would either be brave enough or indiscreet enough!

304: TO J. A. SPENDER

Venice
May 13th, 1911

My beloved Friend,

Like the Prince of Wales I daily read my *Westminster Gazette*, so I need not write to feel in touch with you! but I send these lines, not wanting you to use one drop of ink, but only to let you know of something I have very much at heart and am engineering like a mole! and that is a world-wide English-speaking government monopoly of *wireless*, to be carried through at the Imperial Conference. *I think it will!* The Australians and New Zealanders, like d—d fools, doing things on the cheap, went to a Germany company and are in a nice mess of inefficiency! One of my disciples, Lieutenant Slee, R.N., 66 Victoria Street (*suckled on wireless!*) has rubbed their noses in it! I believe my namesake, the Australian Prime Minister,[1] wants to come here to see me en route to England, but I hope he won't — it will affect susceptibilities! Which is my sole reason for keeping out of England for a year! (as I think I told you).

I have been again vehemently urged to return to the Committee of Defence to pulverize the militarists! They have a fine show there now! FIVE Generals! and a Napoleon in command of them! (Don't they call him Napoleon B.?) But as you have so over and over again pointed out, the British Public ain't ever going to give up the Navy! Some friend has just sent me a lovely bit out of the *Manchester Courier*, which I fancy is Tory, saying, 'I'm d—d if that scoundrel Fisher wasn't right after all'!

[1] Andrew Fisher, Prime Minister of Australia, 1908-1909, 1910-1913, 1914-1915.

Well! this line is only to say, don't say anything, but if, when this wireless scheme comes along, just kindly 'plump' for it! Don't bother to answer. My fond love to you both.

Yours 'till charcoal sprouts'! Fisher

I wonder if I shall ever get anyone indiscreet enough to edit my memoirs? I am making notes now. It must be some woman, I think, or — *Stead!*

305: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Venice
[May 18th, 1911]

My dear Guardian Saint,

Before pouring out my delight at the courageous splendour of R.'s flying,[1] I want to urge you vehemently to impress on R. to put the whole of his money on Hankey[2] (who, as Esher truly says, is Napoleonic in his ideas!), AND TO SOLELY RELY ON HANKEY to prepare the Admiralty presentment for the Imperial Conference. Of course R. won't let *A. K. W. or anyone else* know that he is employing Hankey, *as that would be fatal!* But I know Hankey *so through and through* (he was with me in the Mediterranean) that *I know* that R. can absolutely rely on him to put forth in unassailable argument '*that* NAVAL *defence for* EVERY PART *of our Empire' is* EVERYTHING! I sent a message long ago to Mr. Fisher, the Commonwealth Prime Minister, not to forget that Australia was an island! But of course it's not desirable to run one's head into Kitchener's stomach! However, it is all summed up in what I began with — *to trust Hankey implicitly,* as he is SATURATED with the right principles! It's an *epoch-making* occasion, and R.'s state paper that he presents to the Imperial Conference, fortified by one of his incisive speeches, will class him among the 'great ones of the earth'! *You mark my words, this will be true!* This is why I am full of all this d—d reiteration about Hankey!

Secret. I have had a dear letter from Sir George Murray,[3] who

[1] Under the auspices of the Parliamentary Aerial Defence Committee a demonstration of the possibilities of military aviation had been given at the Hendon Aerodrome on May 12th. During the day McKenna, Balfour, and others were taken up for short flights.

[2] The very able Royal Marine Captain Maurice P. A. (afterwards Colonel, first Baron) Hankey, Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence since 1908, who succeeded Ottley as Secretary, 1912-1938.

[3] Sir George Murray, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, 1903-1911.

spontaneously writes to me that the Admiralty is going strong, and all well, except for an extraordinary desire to revert to submarine mines, which fills him with astonishment, but they were exposed so mercilessly, only 5 years ago, as d—d folly, that I told Murray in reply he need not fear. Don't mention that Murray wrote to me, or let him know either. (I think aloud to you!!!) Also Bertie, the Ambassador at Paris, writes to me [May 9th] a most interesting suspicion of the German Emperor's desire for a German port on the Atlantic Coast of Morocco. I gave Lansdowne and Balfour a paper about this very point (over 5 years ago it must be) and pointed out the spot, but I forget the name of the beastly place — I think it's just on the French frontier, a natural harbour, but wanting dredging and a mole.

I got no answer to my letter from Mrs. Asquith, but I don't know that it wanted an answer. Well! You did wisely in not sending on my letter to Lloyd George — you're as good as Knollys, who used to intercept and burn half my letters, I believe! Now comes the '*Flying Feat*' — IT WAS TRULY SPLENDID!!! And you are as good as Lady Hamilton, who sent Nelson to Trafalgar! (I CAN'T GIVE YOU HIGHER PRAISE!!!) when you urged him to go! It's one of the human incidents which makes a man! Also I admire Balfour!

All the same, my beloved saint! you take care that R. walks warily, even though the Welsh sun is shining on him! And mind this, that if the Army Estimates don't get pulled down next year, it will be bad for the Navy, for it is quite easy to make a case for NOT reducing the Navy Estimates (as they will be reduced), and if the Army Estimates don't go down with a big decrease, there will be Hell! And Lloyd George is the man who ought to see this himself. . . .

Sir Hedworth Lambton and all that lot seem to be reigning supreme at the Palace! *Let 'em reign!*

'Let those laugh who win'!

Yours for evermore,

F.

When you have time later on, send me a few lines. *They are much valued!* Rub in to R. about Hankey! . . .

306: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Venice
May 24th, 1911

My beloved First Lord,

I'm just on the point of starting for Nauheim (to join my eldest daughter there, as 'she won't be happy till she gets me'!), but I can't start off without sending you a line of anxiety both about your beloved Pamela and also YOURSELF, as I am hearing from other quarters that you don't seem to be strong, so really I am going to start again to persuade you for Gastein, as apparently it did wonders for Balfour . . . and as for your Pamela, that frail body of hers isn't equal to the gigantic spirit, so I hope her mother will keep her caged at Munstead.

I expected the Deputy Master of the Trinity House would make a call at the Admiralty — they are in a blue funk! *They are going to hear more of it!* Polonius was quite right. Don't enter into a quarrel lightly, he says, but when in it, 'fight like Hell'! (I don't think those are the exact words!) Also I am very delighted you are 'assimilating' Hankey for the Imperial Conference! You really will make a big thing of it — IF ONLY you'll take the immense trouble you did in the Beresford Committee, and put it all out *in your own words* — not in Hankey's. It will be an epoch-making speech and memorandum if you do justice to yourself, but I am afraid you want some importunate beast at your elbow to keep on nagging at you to do it! *The world-wide, English-speaking,* GOVERNMENT MONOPOLY *of wireless* is also a VITAL necessity — 'wireless is the pith and marrow of war'! *and no one at the Admiralty* has any conception of the *prodigious possibilities of wireless development!* So we ought to get a world-wide system in Government hands, and ought to be in Admiralty hands, but no use saying that unless I was First Sea Lord to see it through, with little Slee as Governor-General! . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

. . . What have you done about that most splendid idea of shortening up Osborne and Dartmouth by one term — *which is absolutely feasible* — so as to give you the extra officers? Hansell thought very well of it. It will cause departmental and scholastic inconvenience, but that is nothing compared to the immense coup! PRAY DO IT! The more I think of your tampering with the scheme with any

Marine Officer alterations, the more I dread such a volume of agitation for other changes that things will be very hot for you inside the House of Commons and outside. *Besides, it's wrong!* However, no use my talking — you've got to work with the instruments you have!

307: TO EDWARD A. GOULDING

Hotel du Nord
Bad Nauheim
June 6th, 1911

My dear Edward,

. . . here I am and don't regret it, as it's a delightful place and I find the air and the waters most exhilarating, and our hotel quite out in the country, and the hares and wild pheasants feeding under my window! If ever you or your dear sister want a tonic, come here!

As to accepting your most seducing invitation, I have sworn and am steadfastly purposed not to come between the limelight and my successor (Sir A. K. Wilson), and my plan has more than justified itself, so I am determined to stay abroad quite clear away till he goes next year, and then I shall emerge again with, I hope, renewed effect,

Recueillir pour mieux sauter!
Resurgam!

But I am not idle now! *I am working like a mole!* Mind, all this I write to you is deadly secret, but I know I can trust you and your sweet sister, so I think aloud to you both! I have been vehemently urged to return home from all sorts of influential quarters, and especially for the Committee of Imperial Defence, because of wild fears that the fundamental policy of the British Empire, that it solely rests on the British Navy, was at stake! BUT I HAD NO FEAR! All the wirepulling in the world won't alter *the vital British policy that the coasts of the enemy are the frontiers of England!* and that great fundamental truth has been swallowed like an oyster by all the Dominion Prime Ministers! (KEEP THIS TO YOURSELF AND BURN THIS LETTER!) These d—d fools who talk about invasion and about our commerce being destroyed and the Declaration of London being an awful

catastrophe (and 51 silly Admirals sign a paper![1]) are of inestimable value, though asses, because they keep the pot boiling! I wouldn't have them contradicted for the world! They keep up the Navy Estimates! The Navy Estimates would be done away with but for them! *Bless their foolish hearts!* I LOVE THEM! Though they don't love me! Don't you worry about either the British Empire or the British Navy! (THEY ARE SYNONYMOUS TERMS!) We are the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel! WE CAN'T GO UNDER! Lord Salisbury gave up the key of Germany in the North Sea when he gave Heligoland to Bismarck's threatenings. Gladstone gave up the key of Germany in the Mediterranean when he gave up Corfu, which locks up Trieste and the Adriatic! Another Prime Minister gave up Minorca, the key of France, another Prime Minister gave up Ceuta and Tangier that lock up the Mediterranean. Another gave up Curaçao, which locks up the Panama Canal. Another Prime Minister (*the biggest d—d fool of the lot!*) gave up Java! And so I might go on, and yet in spite of the idiots who govern us, *we never were so absolutely paramount as now!* WHY? Because our Navy at this moment could take on all the Navies of the world! '*Let 'em all come!*'

'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star,
In high cabal have made us what we are.'

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher
(The world forgetting —
by the world forgot!)[2]

308: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Please burn. Bad Nauheim
Secret June 19th, 1911

My beloved First Lord,

I've just heard from a really good outside source where Napoleon B. is a *persona gratissima* that in the inner arcana the idea is being

[1] The Declaration of London (1909), defining the nature of contraband and the rules of blockade in time of war, had been signed by Great Britain and the other great naval powers, but had met with strong criticism in England. It included that of many admirals, who condemned the Declaration as a menace to Great Britain, especially owing to the sanction of the sinking of neutral prizes and the failure to secure the prohibition of the conversion of merchant ships on the high seas. The Declaration was never ratified by Great Britain.

[2] How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
Pope: 'Eloisa to Abelard' (1717).

revived of an '*Imperial Defence Minister*', with his office at 2, Whitehall Gardens! (Ottley and Co. know nothing whatever of this!) and that Napoleon B. is to be the man! And you to be made a Peer and something else, I can't guess what! and the Master of Elibank[1] to the War Office! *I should not write and tell you this, had I not got it from a good source!* It may be all nonsense. Also — and this is *most secret* — Goulding wrote and said he knew Winston would love to meet me, and could I come and stay at Wargrave on July 22nd, and he would ask Winston, but I declined. Also to be there at same time were Bonar Law, F. E. Smith, Garvin, and some one else! Please keep all this to yourself, as I know Goulding is absolutely intent on serving me and is not playing anyone else's game. . . .

Also I am truly delighted to tell you that I hear via Esher how excellent you were at the Conference on the Navy and that 'THE ADMIRALTY HAS BEEN THE GREAT SUCCESS OF THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE'. *Heaven bless you! Confound all your enemies!* AND BLAST ALL THEIR KNAVISH TRICKS!!!

I'm writing to catch the post. BURN THIS LETTER. DON'T TROUBLE TO ANSWER!!!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

309: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Bad Nauheim
June 25th, 1911

My beloved E.,

. . . I still get pestered from all quarters to return, *but I won't!* I won't get between the limelight and A. K. Wilson! When he goes, then I'm ready.

I answered a question yesterday that King Edward was always on the winning side because he had the unfailing sagacity to put his money on the right horse! *He did not run down the 3 D's!* Dreadnoughts, Democracy and the Declaration [of London?]! I gave that as an example. No doubt you'll see the application. . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

[1] Alexander W. C. O. Murray (afterwards first Baron Murray of Elibank), styled Master of Elibank until 1912, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Chief Whip), 1910-1912.

Postscript. I've just read in *The Times* of June 24, below the chart of the Naval Review, the compressed moral of that scene! 'THE INCOMPARABLE FIGHTING EFFICIENCY OF THE FLEET AND ITS INSTANT READINESS FOR WAR'. What a contrast to the Dogger Bank time!! (the day I assumed office — *October 21, 1904!*) No simile is adequate to describe that contrast! 'Heaven and Hell', 'Light and Darkness', don't convey the chaos! and yet, dear friend, is there a man in the crowd or the King on his throne who appreciates it! One of the greatest of men said, 'I leave to future times to put things right!' Myself, I believe only in the Day of Judgment! Have I told you of the last chapters of Lecky's *Map of Life*? *They are fine!* He says it's good to dwell on the works achieved in vanished years and quotes those immortal words of Dryden:

> 'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
> [But] What has been, has been, and I have had my hour.'[1]

Yes! but what has it cost in a life of vilification, and to end as an outcast and a private income of £302.6.8! while those who have never done one good little thing for the Navy, but on the contrary rebelled, are basking in the sunshine of favour and reaping what they have not sown! In 1886 [1887] I might have been a millionaire, but I don't regret![2]

310: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

July 12th, 1911

My dear First Lord,

. . . I wrote the other day to an admirer of yours [Ottley] that you were never so good as when you were squeezed in a tight place! (Like the sweet-scented geranium leaf, it brings out your goodness!) And I don't offer you any advice, as your astuteness far transcends mine! — *e.g., Beresford and Co.!* But it really is fundamental you should have a Board of Admiralty thoroughly loyal to you, and I hope you'll stick at nothing when A.K.W. goes to get *the whole Board* rearranged if necessary. DON'T YOU HAVE ANY FEAR THAT YOU CAN'T DO IT! I am intensely delighted that you think any cabal against you is powerless.

[1] A favourite Fisher quotation, from Dryden's 'Paraphrase of Horace, the Twenty-Ninth Ode of the Third Book' (1685), which he learned from his reading of Lecky's *Map of Life*. 'Whenever (as I often do) I pass Dryden's bust in Westminster Abbey I invariably thank him for these lines' (*Memories*, p. 281).

[2] See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 99.

You see Repington has got *£500* a year as Editor of the War Office Magazine,[1] and I think Thursfield must now be hoping to get something similar out of Napoleon B. also by resurrecting Napoleon B.'s interpolation in the Beresford Report! For which God forgive him! *for I never shall!* I may yet be even with him!

If the Prime Minister keeps his courage, what a magnificent prospect the Tory stupidity has spread before him! And his Government in power till A.D. 1916! *I hope you will preserve your amiable relations with him and Lloyd George! . . .*

Ever yours always,

Fisher

311: TO ARNOLD WHITE

July 15th, 1911

Private

My dear Friend,

. . . So poor Fabian Ware has been 'fired out' and Gwynne reigns in his place![2] I have a letter of Gwynne's: 'Always remember that whatever you do you can count on the *Standard* backing you up. I really believe that our readers are getting to understand Hanotaux's saying. It has been repeated to them often enough'. (Hanotaux had been French Foreign Minister and wrote about the Naval Reforms started in October 1904! No doubt you saw it. *Perhaps the most enthusiastic backing I ever got!*) And yet Gwynne has been my most acrimonious vilifier! . . .

But how interesting is a cutting I just have from *Reynolds* newspaper! [*Reynolds News*] It says that Alan Burgoyne, M.P.[3] (*a real good sort!*), has published in the *Navy League Journal* recently that '*we have* TWELVE *Dreadnoughts in commission as against Germany's* FIVE'! This is *A.D. 1911*, when in A.D. *1909* I told them to sleep quietly in

[1] Repington had been appointed, in the spring of 1911, Editor of the *Army Review*, a quarterly under the direction and control of the Imperial General Staff.

[2] Fabian (afterwards Major-General Sir Fabian) Ware, Editor of the *Morning Post*, 1905-1911, was succeeded by H. A. Gwynne (Editor of the *Standard*, 1904-1911), 1911-1937.

[3] Afterwards Sir Alan Burgoyne; Conservative M.P., 1910-1922, 1924-1929, and founder and Editor of the *Navy League Annual*, 1907-1914. Burgoyne 'is a *patriot*! and does not care a damn for party where the fighting efficiency of the Navy is at stake'. 'He was so sympathetic and so steadfast . . . when I was at the lowest ebb of my fortunes that I have a tender feeling for him!' (Fisher to Yexley, October 12th, 1911, and to Fiennes, April 17th, 1910, respectively).

their beds! 26 months is our time for completion! No one touches us yet! . . . I was largely responsible for the Estimates of 1909 (I left in January 1910), and I think it may be said we are safe in 1911! *Are you an Islander?* If so, it is more than the Islanders' standard! Mr. Taft knows that the British Navy was never so supremely predominant as at this moment, and Mr. Woodrow Wilson, his successor, knows it also, and they therefore know that the great English-speaking Federation is not urged in England by fear. But they fear Germany in Brazil and, you mark, the Agadir[1] will get a quiet Monroe Doctrine look from the new world! because the nicest nearest spot to it! . . .

Always yours,

Fisher

312: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Bad Nauheim
August 1st, 1911
(The Battle of the Nile)

My beloved E.,

. . . You will see in the *Standard* of July 29 the London Correspondent of the *Irish Times* . . . lets out about Lord Fisher and war arrangements, but as the *Standard* in the very same issue makes this announcement in big type: 'We (Great Britain) are in the satisfactory position of having *twice as many Dreadnoughts in commission as Germany* AND A NUMBER GREATER BY ONE UNIT THAN THE WHOLE OF THE REST OF THE WORLD PUT TOGETHER'!, I don't think there is the very faintest fear of war! How wonderfully Providence guides England! Just when there is a quite natural tendency to ease down our naval endeavours comes AGADIR! . . .

I need not say to you that I remain in the closest bonds with the Admiralty. I never did a wiser thing than coming abroad and remaining abroad and working like a mole! *I shall not return till July 1912.* Most damnable efforts against me continue in full swing:

[1] The Agadir (or 'Second Moroccan') Crisis of June-September 1911 was touched off by the arrival of the German gunboat *Panther* (July 1st) at Agadir, on the coast of Morocco, ostensibly to protect German interests and nationals there. Actually, it was a bludgeon to force colonial concessions from the French. In England, however, there was a fear that Germany intended to secure a naval base at Agadir. The crisis blew over in September-October, with an agreement (signed on November 4th) for the German recognition of the French protectorate in Morocco in return for a substantial slice of the French Congo.

nevertheless, like Gideon, 'Faint yet pursuing' is my motto![1] And yet because in 1907 at the Guildhall, when this result had been arranged for in the Navy Estimates of the year and I said '*Sleep quiet in your beds!*', I was vehemently vilified with malignant truculence, and only yesterday I got a letter from an Aristocrat of the Aristocrats, saying he had heard it stated by a man of eminence the day before that I was in the pay of Germany!

It is curious that I can't get over the personal great blank I feel in the death of our late blessed friend King Edward! There was something in the charm of his heart that still chains one to his memory — some magnetic touch!

> '*Le cœur a ses raisons que la*
> *raison ne connaît point.*'

Pascal was a great man to have said that!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

313: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Grand Hotel National
Lucerne
August 20th, 1911

My beloved First Lord,

. . . This is only 18 hours off, so I am always at your service in the lowest capacity *so long as I can help you!* I hope you continue *to put your whole trust in Hankey*, for it is true what Esher says of him that he is a Napoleon! Don't give me away to Spender or to 'Napoleon B.' by 'any chance word,' but REST ASSURED that if the Government land a single British soldier in France (*or even entertain any plans for it!*), there will be an upheaval in England that will cast them out of office! Sir John French once came to me about it as the tool of Sir William Nicholson, but I told him to go to Hell! The whole single object is compulsory service and an increase of the Army Estimates and military influence. I much fear the Prime Minister may be 'nobbled' by 'Napoleon B.'

I am in the very best hotel I ever was in, and danced EIGHT

[1] There follows a clipping from the *Naval and Military Record* of July 12th, saying Britain would have, by March 1912, twenty dreadnoughts and 'Invincibles' in commission, whereas the German Fleet would at most have ten.

waltzes last night with the same partner without ever stopping for one second. *She was only 17, so it didn't signify!*

Heaven bless you both. It was sweet of you to write. I see Poë does not retire till *September 1914*. I am not sure he may not be useful to you in case of any impasse in A.K.W.'s successor, but as I told you once before, you are so far more subtle than I am that I absolutely feel precluded from troubling your brain as regards appointments, but you MUST have a Board of Admiralty that will see you through anything in view of the financial fights you have ahead of you.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

314: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Lucerne
August 21st, 1911

Dearest Cis,

. . . I see the railway strike is over, which is a sell for the German Government. They thought it was going to embarrass us in the event of war, which is not so unlikely as it outwardly seems. *But keep this private.* I'm in touch with McKenna and heard from him yesterday, and can be home in 18 hours. I couldn't well be in a better place. *Secret.* I had a warning to leave Germany, but don't breathe a word of this. The Swiss Post Office is all right and the mail goes through France, so I can say as much as I do. *Personally*, I don't think anything will occur: WE ARE TOO STRONG! But it's a fierce temptation for Germany, as the Socialist Party are going to win at the coming Elections, and only a war can humbug them. Also, the French are without Generals, or Admirals either. But anyhow I don't think war is coming, but it is well to be ready.[1] . . .

Ever your loving father,

F.

I've asked Mother to send you an interesting paper about the Fisher crest. However, nothing comes up to '*Fisher — verbum non amplius*'!!! . . .

[1] Further on the same theme: 'I had a long letter from Esher yesterday, who seems to think war is likely, but I am quite sure WE ARE TOO STRONG for the Germans to do anything. But it's curious how nervous all the "big-wigs" seem to be! *The fact is* that none of them know how strong we are, and every Englishman is a fool in his pessimism!' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, August 26th, 1911).

315: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Lucerne

[ca. August 26th, 1911]

Secret and Private

My most beloved E.,

Your letter was most welcome! but I shouldn't have written again so soon except for just now seeing in a Paris paper that Sir John French, accompanied by four officers, had landed in Calais en route to the French Headquarters, and expiating on the evident intention of joint military action! Do you remember the classic interview with the late King in his cabin? If this is on the tapis again, then we have another deep regret for the loss of that sagacious intuition! He may not have been clever, but he never failed in his judgment on whose opinion to rely! I had half a mind to write dear Francis, but on second thoughts I considered it might embarrass him and also be dangerous for him to get any letters from me at all! Of course there may be nothing in it! Nor do I think there is the least likelihood of war. ENGLAND IS FAR TOO STRONG! Yet I daily get letters anticipating my early return. I don't write to anyone and I don't ask any questions. It is best. I only send these few lines to tell you what I've seen in the Paris newspaper. . . .

Yours,

F.

. . . I enclose you a letter from Appleyard, received a little time ago. He is the Editor of the Engineering Supplement of *The Times*. He is a very eminent civil engineer. There is a 'dead set' being made to get the Midshipmen under the New Scheme to rebel against 'engineering'! *Beresford*, *Lambton* & Co. are *persistently* at it through their friends in the Fleet like H. H. Campbell, etc., etc., and calling those Midshipmen who go in for engineering 'greasers'. The inevitable result of the present young officers of the Navy disparaging and slighting this chief necessary qualification of engineering in these engineering days will be to force the throwing open of entry as officers in the Navy *to all classes of the population and adopting State-paid education and support* till the pay is sufficient to support!

316: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Lucerne
September 19th, 1911

Dearest Cis,

. . . He [the hotel manager] is really a most charming man — never speaks to you unless you speak to him first, and a regular Napoleon to look at! He is only about 30! but he rules the 1,000 in his hotel with the iron hand in the silken glove! The hotel is a marvel of organization and luxury! No wonder the millionaires flock here![1] Every wish and thought anticipated! *and they have to pay!* which they seem to love doing! But alas! they are all gone! Not a 'citizeness' of the Great Republic is left here now! I *did indeed* have some splendid partners amongst them! I seldom went to bed before 3 a.m. for about 3 weeks, I think! A dance every night nearly!

If I go to America, I shall be there *three years at least* to get through my invitations! Mount Clemens (near Detroit) and Boston and Pasadena — those are the 3 principal places I have promised to stay 3 months at, at each place. They want me to go over in September 1912 — this time next year!

There is splendid sun, but very 'nippy' air! This morning at 8.30 a.m. it was 48°; only 5 days ago it was 75° at same hour, and the same all through the night! So far as temperature goes, I don't think I'm meant for Heaven!

My fondest love to you all.

Your loving father,

F.

317: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Lucerne
September 20th, 1911

My dear E.,

Through dancing with a sweet American (and indeed they are truly delightful, especially if you have the same partner all night!) I hear via a Bremen multi-millionaire that, though the most optimistic official assurances of peace emanate from Berlin, yet there is the most extreme nervousness amongst the German business men

[1] 'I think I am the only pauper in the hotel! But the manager and all the servants are all most polite to me all the same, and I pay less than at Nauheim! Of course, I have a back room and high up, but very comfortable . . .' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, August 18th, 1911).

because of the revelation to them of the French power both financially and fightingly, so unexpected by them. I suppose if a Pitt or a Palmerston had now been guiding our destinies we should have war. They would say any peace would be a bad peace because of the latent damnable feeling in Germany against England. It won't be France any more, it will be England that will be the red rag for the German bull! And as we NEVER were so strong as at present, then Pitt & Co. would say the present is the time to fight![1] Personally, I am confident of peace. I happen to know in a curious way (but quite certainly) that the Germans are in a blue funk of the British Navy and are quite assured that 942 German steamers would be 'gobbled up' in the first 48 hours of war, and also the d—d uncertainty of *where* and *when* a hundred thousand troops embarked in transports and kept 'in the air' might land! N. B. There's a lovely spot only 90 miles from Berlin! Anyhow, they would demobilize about a million German soldiers!

But I am getting 'off the line' now! I really sat down to write and tell you of a two days' visit paid to me here by the new American Ambassador to Berlin. *He is a faithful friend.* He is *very, very* PRO-English. (He has such a lovely daughter, whom I have been dancing with, A PERFECT GEM![2] If she don't turn Wilhelm's head, I'll eat my hat!) My friend was American Ambassador at Constantinople when I was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet — you know it was a ticklish time then, at the worst of the Boer War, and the British Navy kept the peace! That old Sultan [Abdul Hamid] told me so, and gave me a 500-guinea diamond star, bless him! and he called Lord Salisbury a d—d fool for having left him in the lurch and for having said that 'England had put her money on the wrong horse' in backing Turkey. The Turks being the *one, one* people in the whole world to be England's fast (and, if put to it, *only*) friend! Well, my dear friend! Leishman saw this *then* in 1899, and sees it *now*, and hence we were locked up for hours in a secret room here! It all bears immensely on the present Franco-German Crisis! That '*greater-than-Bismarck*' who is now German Ambassador at

[1] 'If Pitt or Palmerston had been Prime Minister, they would have forced France to fight, as she has now the best artillery in the world, and a great military expert says her Army is now really better than the Germans', and Belgium the only way into France, which means that England would occupy Antwerp and could hold it with the Fleet as a second Gibraltar' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, September 26th, 1911).

[2] John G. A. Leishman, U.S. Ambassador at Berlin, 1911-1913, was then en route to his post. He had been U.S. Minister at Constantinople, 1900-1906, then first Ambassador, 1906-1909, and Ambassador at Rome, 1909-1911. His daughter Nancy became Duchess of Croy.

Constantinople (Marschall von Bieberstein), and who is the real director of German policy (Waechter[1] is only his factotum! as I will prove to you presently!), sees his rear and flanks quite safe by having the Turks in the palm of his hand (as Leishman describes it!), and so has been led to bluff at Agadir — but those choice words of Lloyd George upset the German apple-cart in a way it was never upset before![2] (I suppose they were '*written*-out' words and Cabinet words, and they were d—d fine words!) Before I go on with the next bit of my letter I must explain to you that Leishman is a very great friend and admirer of Marschall von Bieberstein and also of Kiderlen-Waechter, the present German Foreign Minister. When Marschall went on his annual 4 months' leave from Constantinople, he always had Waechter to take his place while away, who was then the German Minister at Bucharest! Leishman is also an ardent admirer of the German Emperor, and he is also the most intimate friend possessed by Mr. Philander Knox, the American Secretary of State [1909-1913], who has forced Leishman to Berlin when he was in Paradise at Rome (at all events his women were!).

Well! dear friend, it's a good thing that Leishman loves England. I couldn't possibly write to Sir E. Grey what I am writing to you (I shouldn't write to you except that this letter goes through France only!), and it would be simply fatal to Leishman if it ever leaked out about his conversations with me, but his heart is with us. I knew this when I spent many weeks at Constantinople (and we had no friends then, 1899 and 1900!). He says *our Turkish policy is the laughing stock of diplomacy!* 'Every schoolboy knows' that we have a Mohammedan existence and the Turks love us, but all we do is to kick their arses! As Leishman truly says, the Germans were in the dust by the deposition of Abdul Hamid, and England was 'all' to the New Turks, but slowly Marschall has worked his way up again, and the Germans again possess the Turks, instead of England. The Turkish Army, the very finest fighting army in the world, was ours for the asking, and 'peace — *perfect peace*'! in India, Egypt, and Persia; but we've chucked it all away because we have had d—d fools as our Ambassadors![3] But how can it be otherwise unless you put in men from

[1] Alfred von Kiderlen-Waechter, German Foreign Secretary, 1910-1912.

[2] Lloyd George's famous Mansion House speech, July 21st, containing a strong warning to Germany that Britain's interests would have to be considered, had ushered in the most intensive phase of the crisis.

[3] Fisher had in mind especially Sir Philip (afterwards first Baron) Currie, 'who simply was the biggest fool we ever had as an Ambassador at Constantinople [1893-1898] (though we have had some pretty bad ones there!) . . .' (Fisher to Lord Stamfordham, September 30th, 1911).

outside, like Bryce at Washington![1] Our strength is Mohammedan, but we are too d—d Christian to see it! and fool about Armenian atrocities and Bulgarian horrors! Tories and Radicals are both the same!

Isn't it wonderful how we get along! I repeat again to you my copyright lines:—

> 'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star,
> In high cabal have made us what we are'!

Look at Delagoa Bay, that might have been ours — indeed was *ours*, only we 'fooled' it away! Look at Lord Granville and the Cameroons![2] Well! I haven't given Leishman away, I don't think! The real German *bonne bouche* was the complete belt across Africa, but this only if the right of pre-emption as regards the Belgian Congo could have been acquired.

I simply tremble at the consequences if the British Redcoats are to be planted on the Vosges frontier.

I think you had best burn this letter!

Yours for evermore, F.

318: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR REGINALD HENDERSON

Lucerne
September 29th, 1911
(Nelson's Birthday)

My dear old Henderson,

A great pleasure to get your letter a few minutes ago! And I quite understand how you are enjoying your delightful home — all of your own designing — but I rather think I prefer the life of the Bedouin Arab which I am now leading, and pitching my tent where I like and where the sun shines! We go from here to Naples at the end of November and remain there till April, when we go to Venice for a couple of months, and I rather think I shall be forced to Kilverstone about next July! I say 'forced,' for I'm afraid if I once return to England I shan't get away again!

[1] James (afterwards first Viscount) Bryce, Ambassador at Washington, 1907-1913, and author of the classic work on American government, *The American Commonwealth* (1888).

[2] In 1861 England had revived claims, dormant since 1823, to Delagoa Bay, Portuguese East Africa, the natural port for the Transvaal. The diplomatic controversy which then began was eventually submitted to the arbitration of the French President, who decided against England in 1875. The second Earl Granville, as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under Gladstone, 1880-1885, had allowed the Cameroons to slip out of British into German possession.

Private. I think McKenna and others have designs on me to be more active on the Committee of Imperial Defence, but between ourselves I have the strongest objection to anyone but the First Sea Lord (whoever he may be) being the 'boss' on Navy business! Of course, it's a very difficult job for McKenna (as he has all the real right instincts in regard to the Navy!) not being supported heart and soul as he should be, so he turns to me, and I don't like to fail him in view of his splendid fighting for the good of the Navy, when all his colleagues were dead against him. . . .

You did a splendid piece of work in Australia, and I have reason to believe that every single item of your report will be eventually carried through. And you will live to be gratified to see its completion, if all I hear is correct, but I must say, in view of what Sir George Reid wrote to me (which, however, was private), I think it quite extraordinary that you were not made a G.C.B. instead of Kennedy,[1] who has never been anything else than a windbag and a self-advertiser! (I think old Reid as much disappointed as myself!) But no doubt there was a strong clique against the idea of a separate Navy, the d—d fools not realizing that half a loaf is better than no bread! . . .

Yours always,

F.

319: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Lucerne
October 1st, 1911

My beloved Friend,

In your letter just come you tell me Lieutenant Dewar[2] attacks me! A few weeks ago, in a letter to the *Daily Mail*, he said, 'Oh! for five minutes of Fisher' (or words to that effect!). It's the *old, old* story! '*To-day* Hosanna! *To-morrow* crucify!' An eloquent Divine here last Sunday told this story in his sermon. William Wilberforce[3] stayed with an aristocrat, who took him into his picture gallery and showed him a magnificent picture of the Crucifixion, and said: 'Mr. Wilberforce, I hear you are a reformer! That's what they do to reformers!' Yes, no Cross! no Christ!

[1] Admiral (ret.) Sir William Kennedy, who had received a G.C.B. in 1911.
[2] Lieutenant (ret.) (afterwards Captain) Alfred C. Dewar.
[3] William Wilberforce, English philanthropist and anti-slavery crusader of the early nineteenth century.

But I am so glad to hear from you, and hope you are not overworking yourself. *Private.* I am not idle, nor do I think powerless! I wrote 7 sheets to McKenna yesterday, 5 sheets to the King's Private Secretary,[1] and 4 sheets to Sir Charles Ottley. I only mention this casually, to let you know I am in touch with the world, *but not for you to mention to anyone.*

I keep on being pestered to return home. I *won't.* Whatever may be his peculiarities, yet the limelight must be kept on A. K. Wilson. If I came home it would be shifted on to me, and also his status in the Committee of Imperial Defence is immensely magnified by my abstention from its sitting. No! As I've often told you, it don't matter what d—d fools rule us, England remains *top dog*! Never in our whole history have we been so powerful or so feared as at this present moment. And someone sent me the *Standard* of July 31 [29], in which it says the British Navy at that date was more powerful than all the navies of the world put together, and on that day England had at sea twice as many Dreadnoughts as Germany! And last week I had my arm round the waist of the wife of the biggest millionaire in Bremen,[2] and she confided to me that her husband had written to say all the German mercantile world were in a 'blue fright' (as she called it) of England making war! Yes! I suppose if we had Pitt or Palmerston with us they would have forced France into war! because they were firm believers in fighting at your own time and recognized, perhaps, the greatest of Nelson's sayings, that 'you don't want a simple victory over your enemy; you want to annihilate him'; and this he did at the Nile, at Copenhagen, and at Trafalgar! *God bless him!*

. . . Beresford is bringing out a book this month . . . called *The Betrayal*, and, of course, I am the Betrayer! I fancy it is hoped I shall be compelled to bring a libel action. There will be a disappointment. I was assured of £20,000 damages over one gross libel, but I declined. I told them of Archbishop Whately's advice, 'Never fight a chimney-sweep! You may knock him senseless, but some of the soot comes off on you'! The one great rule of life is, 'NEVER EXPLAIN'.[3]

[1] Captain (afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel) Sir Arthur Bigge, recently created the first Baron Stamfordham, private secretary to King George V, 1901-1931. (Knollys, elevated to a viscountcy in July 1911, was the other private secretary, 1910-1913.)

[2] The chief proprietor of the North German Lloyd, whose name is not known to the writer.

[3] It was Benjamin Jowett, the Greek scholar and Master of Balliol (d. 1893), who said that the first rule of life was 'never explain'.

I. Your friends don't want an explanation. They believe in you.
II. The friends who want an explanation ain't fit to be friends.
III. Your enemies won't believe any explanation!

I never in all my life have ever yet explained, and don't mean to. The Day of Judgment will clear up things all right! and it ain't so far off! Perhaps the Battle of Armageddon is coming along now! The world has yet to learn what the Mohammedans can do if once the holy fervour seizes them! When that d—d fool Lord Salisbury, in addition to the criminal folly of giving up Heligoland (the key of Germany in the north, and only equalled by the criminal folly of Gladstone in person giving up Corfu, the key of Germany in the south), insulted the whole Mohammedan world by saying 'we had put our money on the wrong horse', he started our downward course, and we have ever since been the laughing-stock of the world as regards our diplomacy, *the whole secret of which is that we are the greatest Mohammedan Power on earth!* If *Islam* holds up its little finger, there is at once unrest in Egypt, Persia, and India! Above all, the time was when the Turkish Army was ours and ours alone. Kiamil Pasha, the greatest of Turks, told me this when he was Vali of Smyrna. But we simply shoved the Turks into the arms of Germany! The Germans put the greatest German the world has known — he is greater than Bismarck — as their Ambassador at Constantinople, and *he is the real ruler of Germany's world policy!* Waechter is his tool, and the German Emperor his facile dupe, and Hollweg[1] his servile copyist! The Mohammedans hold the key of the world and we send any d—d fool that passes by (he happens now to be the Speaker's brother!) [Sir Gerard Lowther] to try to snatch it out of the iron hand of Marschall von Bieberstein! Nevertheless, dear friend, *we are all right!* We gave up even worse things than Heligoland and Corfu! WHAT A LIST!!! Tangier, Port Mahon, Curaçao, Java, America, Delagoa Bay, etc., etc. Yet we are paramount!

'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star!
In high cabal have made us what we are.'

Yours always,

Fisher

[1] Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, German Chancellor, 1909-1917.

320: TO A. G. GARDINER

Lucerne
October 5th, 1911

Private

I am here with Lady Fisher till Christmas and then going on to Naples. *Please burn.*

My dear Gardiner,

I have picked up an old number of the *Daily News* and an article therein fires my admiration! (Perhaps you wrote it yourself!) The gist of it is that some fifth-rate diplomatic fool supported by his 'sisters and his cousins and his aunts' at the Foreign Office (whose *permanent sustained* pressure none but a Cromwellian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs could resist) is able to plunge our Great Empire into a beastly mess before the Public have any power to intervene! My pretty big experience with our diplomats is that their habitual residence abroad and their marriage with foreigners leads to their ceasing being Englishmen. (To put in a man like Bryce from the outside is a very rare occurrence!) Look at Constantinople! Who represents us? Who represents Germany? Marschall von Bieberstein is a greater than Bismarck. The Mohammedan key is the key of the British Empire, for we have more Mohammedan subjects than any other Power in the world, and when Islam holds up its little finger there is unrest in Egypt, Persia, and India! *Our diplomacy is effete!* A great friend of mine (the new American Ambassador in Berlin) told me the other day it's the laughing-stock of Constantinople, where he has been Ambassador (but lately at Rome). What we have to agitate for and what I have urged for years past is that these high diplomatic positions should be cut off from the permanent Civil Service. No political party will dare to send a d—d fool under the limelight of public opinion.

Kindly burn this letter, *and don't trouble to answer!*

Yours always,

Fisher

321: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Lucerne
October 10th, 1911

My beloved E.,

. . . I yesterday had a long letter from McKenna begging me to return and '*put the gloves on again*'! and in view of his arguments I am going to do so when A. K. Wilson vanishes early next year! It is,

however, distasteful to me. I've had a lovely time here. Fancy! for 3 whole weeks a dance every blessed night till 3 a.m.! and these lovely Americans DO dance divinely! It WAS lovely! I renewed my youth!

The King sent me a haunch of venison, which rather surprised me! I thought I was off the list! I took the opportunity to write Bigge a letter when thanking [him] for it, as he formerly was by way of being a friend. But I don't know that I was wise, because better to keep clear altogether, with that skunk Campbell as the King's conscience! . . . I don't ever write to dear old Knollys. I always feel it may embarrass him! I hope he understands.

How very strange it will feel to come back again into 'the *fighting line*' next spring! We seem absolutely devoid of a foreign policy just now! and there is no real *one big man* for the big things at home! We want *a man* badly! *Someone who doesn't care a d—n!*

Yours always,

F.

322: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Lucerne
[ca. October 10th, 1911]

PRIVATE

Dear Arnold White,

A line to tell you privately that I've unexpectedly had a very long (and *affectionate even!*) letter from Kennedy Jones. Apparently he is going to flatten out Beresford's book! *but please don't say a word!* He also tells me he was asking Garvin to dinner. I thought Garvin had shaken off the dust of his feet against Northcliffe & Co., but I should not now be again so soon writing to you except for one VERY pregnant passage in K. J.'s letter as regards Lloyd George. He says he has definitely come to the conclusion that he (Lloyd George) is THE only man we have at all able to cope with the seething unrest now agitating the masses! So your letter to Lady F. this morning (which has IMMENSELY delighted her!) in which you mention your visit to Lloyd George gave me great delight, for I think we all ought to sink party feelings in getting our masters solid for patriotism! and the belly comes before patriotism, and our starved babies without a drop of milk before the d—d foolishness of peculiar kinds of Tariff Reform and senseless defences against impossible and impracticable invasion!

Also since I wrote to you in the last 4 days I've had six beseeching entreaties from very high Influences to re-enter 'the Bull Ring'! I so remember your verses!

'Girls! Put your red aprons away to-day
The Bull of Seville is coming this way!'

How all the toreadors would again once more fling their malignant darts at me! but I think I should 'rip' them all up more effectively than ever before! Curiously I feel far more 'ginger' in me than what I remember 10 years ago! *It's my dancing, I think!*[1] . . .

Yours always,

F.

Kindly don't mention that K. J. has written to me! *but you keep in with Lloyd George!* With your persuasive *pen-power* and *eloquence* you will guide him into good.

323: TO J. A. SPENDER

Lucerne
October 13th, 1911

My dear Spender,

On the chance of your not being on the N.W. Frontier of India, I feel impelled this morning to send you a few lines in case your military adviser has not brought it to your notice what a most lovely light this Turco-Italian War throws on the invasion-scaremongers' theory of 'only a few hours command of the sea being required to throw a hundred thousand men on the shores of England'. The Italians are only sending 30,000 men! They have had complete command of the sea! They were preparing for months beforehand! It is weeks since war was declared! Turkey has not even an armed dinghy outside the Dardanelles! (yes, I believe there are some one-pounder Custom House boats on the Albanian Coast), yet I've just read that only 'PART' of the expeditionary force of 30,000 men has left Port Augusta in Sicily — that even the 'part' is 5 miles long on the ocean, that they are only going 10 knots in the day and still slower

[1] '. . . it is quite extraordinary to myself how phenomenally fit I feel . . . (A man wrote to me this morning and says he thinks I must be "twins"!! a lovely idea!) Well, I really have had the time of my life here! Fancy! for 3 weeks dancing every blessed night till *3 a.m.* with the most splendid women on earth for dancing (the Americans! No women touch them!).' (Fisher to Fiennes, October 12th, 1911).

at night for fear of collisions amongst the merchant ship transports, unused to keeping station like men-of-war, and that still they are in dread of some hidden Turkish torpedo attack, as the Russians were at the Dogger Bank on October 20, 1904, and yet that d—d scoundrel whom you call, I think, an honest man, *but he isn't!*, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, tries to blind the British Public by an article this morning that the whole point of it all is that the Italians are not in a hurry! If ever on this earth there was an occasion for hurry, it was so with the Italians. So obvious are the reasons, I will not insult your common sense by stating them! . . .

Yours 'till we part at the Pearly Gates',

Fisher

324: TO JOHN LEYLAND

Lucerne
October 17th, 1911

Private

My dear Leyland,

There's a big conspiracy afloat engineered by the Beresfordians to hamper and indeed imperil the New Scheme of naval training in its essential feature of insisting on our officers being masters of that engineering knowledge without which a right mastery of a modern man-of-war is an impossibility and the Navy would relapse into the condition of the tail wagging the dog, as the artisans and mechanics of the ship would be those controlling the motive power of guns, torpedoes, and propelling engines. I grieve to hear that high countenance is being given, not at the Admiralty, but amongst high officers and high personages, and those young Midshipmen who evince any leaning towards engineering are called 'greasers' and are boycotted, etc., etc. Of course if I were still in the land of the living there would be three or four Post Captains on permanent half-pay to-morrow morning who now command battleships! and some dozen or so Midshipmen sent home to their parents for some other sphere in life! I always think it was so nice of Lord St. Vincent that he headed-up a man in a cask and threw him overboard, not that he had committed any overt act of mutiny, but '*he looked sulky*' as St. Vincent passed him! *It wants a bit of St. Vincent now!*

However, that is not what I want you to inculcate just now by word or pen, but I want to put it to you very forcibly that if this

agitation gets very much further, it will inevitably lead to throwing open the Navy to the masses of the people by means of State-paid education and support till the officers are able to support themselves. Instead of the officers of the Navy being a close preserve limited to those who have an income of about a thousand a year and so restricting our choice of brains to 1/40th of the population!, the other 39/40ths will sweep in and they will sweep away in so doing much that we may wish to retain. But once Democracy gets let loose, then remember the French Revolution and how the French Navy was denuded of its officers! Thursfield in the past has written some excellent articles on State-paid education and opening the Navy to the masses, and I have again told him about it, so possibly he may do something. I only mention this to let you know I have written to him. Hurd of the *Daily Telegraph* writes to me confidentially and tells me of this agitation by the Beresford clique, which now has high aid! *Remember Rehoboam!* Like a d—d fool he discarded the advice of his father's counsellors!

What a most lovely 'fixing up' of our invasion scaremongers is the Italian invasion of Morocco [Tripoli]!!! . . . I won't insult your common sense by stating the obvious reasons for the Italians to 'hustle' all they possibly could to land their 30,000 men in Tripoli at the very earliest possible instant so as to make it all a *fait accompli* before scandalized Europe woke to the damnable rascality of the whole business! . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

325: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Lucerne
October 20th, 1911

My beloved E.,

. . . in the last week I have had further most pressing and indeed most vehement appeals to re-enter the bull-ring.

> 'Girls! Put your red aprons away to-day!
> The Bull of Seville is coming this way!'

I gave you that couplet before and repeat it, because it seems to me that '*all the fat would be in the fire*' once more if I re-enter the bull-ring, and the calumnious darts, so envenomed because these Beresfordian toreadors know themselves to be so beaten, would again be hurled

at me, and, naturally, I should instinctively be again in the forefront of the battle! *I see you yourself have doubts about my returning!* I am on the closest possible terms of intimacy with McKenna, and, absolutely between ourselves, he so wants me back because I should really be running the Admiralty and doing the fighting on the Defence Committee. *But is this desirable?* I don't think you can possibly think so! but it can't well be otherwise if I am there! (It sounds very egotistical, but you have to remember I was for 15 years in the Admiralty and every mother's son there will do my bidding, and you know the immense momentum of a huge public office overcomes immense obstacles.) No! I really think it's best for me to remain away. Read the last two chapters of Lecky's *Map of Life*!

> 'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
> What has been, has been, and I have had my hour.'

Dear old A. K. Wilson is at this moment staying with my son in Norfolk shooting (*1,100* pheasants in one day!), and my son says he's as tough and keen as the youngest of them there. So there he is to take command at sea for the next *5* years (*at the very least*), which is a heavenly comfort for us, and no doubt, as long as McKenna remains where he is, that I should be at the Admiralty in case of war. But as you say (so acutely), it is damnable for Haldane and Nicholson to be trampling the Sea Officers under foot, and, therefore, two fighting men are wanted as First Sea Lord and D.N.I.[1] We shall see whom McKenna will select. I sent him 8 sheets on the matter a few days ago, and begged him not to lean on me. He has not at all a good Board of Admiralty now. They are not harmonious. *That's the vital necessity. They must act as one man!* and, thank God! it was always so all my time!

It is *more than gratifying* what you say to me about the King having kind words and thoughts for me, for it is so diligently circulated about that the state of his mind is the exact contrary! I wonder if he would give me apartments at Hampton Court Palace, as Wolseley[2] has? I had half a mind to ask Bigge, but, on the whole, I think perhaps best to leave things alone (and to let them come *unsolicited*, if they come at all). This only comes into my mind because of your remarks of the King's amicable feelings! From what the late King once said at Sandringham, I should have been all right had he lived! (Bless

[1] The Director of Naval Intelligence, 1909-1912, was Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) the Hon. Sir Alexander Bethell.

[2] Field-Marshal (ret.) the first Viscount Wolseley, onetime Commander-in-Chief of the Army (1895-1899).

him!) He was asking me my advice at the time about giving some apartments away that were then vacant at Hampton Court Palace!

. . .

Beresford is going to bring out a mass of libels and lies, but I shall take no notice whatever. ('NEVER EXPLAIN' is the golden rule of life!) But what an amazing pity that the Prime Minister allowed Haldane to water down and emasculate his own original smashing condemnation of Beresford in the Beresford Committee Report! It would have flattened him out for ever. *Now* he (Beresford) quotes the Committee's report as favouring him, and so it does! *Haldane played me a d—d dirty trick, and he knows it!* I have never told you half that story of Haldane's dinner with journalists the night before the issue of the report, but he didn't succeed there. They were my friends!

Yours for evermore,

F.

326: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Lucerne
October 24th, 1911

Dearest Cis,

. . . I had a really lovely letter from Alan Burgoyne yesterday. He is a really splendid fighter. They all sing the same song — wanting me back. They forget Polonius in *Hamlet*. Don't enter into a fray till you're sure, but then fight like blazes! I don't see just now any real big thing anywhere! I don't want to waste my powder and shot over sparrows! Nor go 'fussing about' looking for a job! Above all, I don't want to get between the limelight and A.K.W. The moment I ever return to England they will all be turning their searchlights on me!

I am only anxious about McKenna! and simply anxious about his personal political future. He has pretty near wrecked himself for the Navy's good! and I am fearing every sort of intrigue to '*promote*' him elsewhere! There would be jubilation at Court and everywhere else! However, don't breathe a word of this. You might send him some pheasants to the Admiralty. They would appreciate it.

I've had an excellent letter from Esher, giving me all the most secret news. It is wonderful how he gets into the innermost secrets! He has been a splendid friend to me.

Fondest love to my sweet Jane.

Your loving father, F.

327: TO J. A. SPENDER

Lucerne
October 25th, 1911

My beloved Friend,

If you could see Winston privately and show him the enclosed letter and could back it up, I think you could say, 'I have done the State some service!' I don't want a living soul to see it, or to *know of it*, except you and Winston. Not even McKenna. Let the secret be between us three, please!

Yours, F.

[Enclosure]

Lucerne
October 25th, 1911

My dear Spender,

In continuation of my letter of yesterday, I fully admit and can endorse all your praise of Winston. You may not know that we were on the terms of the closest intimacy, and he was a splendid friend to me. I think I was the first he told of his engagement to be married, and Cassel and I were the first to dine with him and his wife after they married — just the four of us. But the time came there was a split between Winston and McKenna, and my duty was with McKenna, and with regret I had to avoid Winston. I mention all this to make quite clear I have no personal feeling whatever against Winston — *absolutely the contrary!* It has so happened lately that I wrote F. E. Smith about submarines and I sent Winston my love, so there had been and is not anything but good feeling for him on my part. Towards me he was never anything else but a staunch friend, and he used to call for me at the Admiralty to take me home to lunch with him. In the 'highest' quarters I was slanged for my intimacy with him, but I stuck to him till 'the parting of the ways' came between him and McKenna. I say all this to ensure your knowing how I stand and stood with Winston.

The next thing is, this being a *fait accompli* that Winston is at the Admiralty, *what is the best thing for the Navy?* The best thing for the Navy is that Winston should have a Board of Admiralty *harmonious, progressive, and determined!* and I have that Board elaborated. He ought to make no change at this moment, go on with the present Board and even keep on the same Private Secretary. Winston surely will not desire to give the least indication of swerving from the vital principle of a strong Navy, and any change at present would be

interpreted in that light. Of course there is another side to that question, *that it would certainly be advantageous for him to start with those he is always going to work with, and more especially is this important in view of the preparation of the Estimates.* So this consideration MAY over-ride the other!

It may surprise you, my dear friend, but since 1886, when I first went to the Admiralty, I was an 'out and out' advocate for friendship with Germany, and I am dead against the French 'Entente' (*really it is an alliance*). If my humble advice had been taken in 1886, I don't believe there ever would have been a German Navy — *they so relied on us then* — but the Tories (*like the d---d fools they always are!*) would not see this, and of all the damnable silly things ever done, the Naval Defence Act beats everything! and saddled us with masses of vessels (still with us) that were obsolete before they were launched and inefficient before they were laid down! Well! that mischief has had its way, and I don't think you have any idea (such as my personal dealings with foreigners lately has emphasized in me) of the universal exasperation and bitterness there is amongst *every class of Germans* against England, and which is fanned to white heat by the *known fact* of our intention of sending an English Army to the Vosges Frontier. The German Emperor stopped the fight — no one else — and my informant is about as well placed to know as anyone!

You will say, what the devil has all this got to do with Winston Churchill? EVERYTHING! I propose he should take as his First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg, the very ablest Admiral after Sir Arthur Wilson that we possess both afloat and ashore. *Private. Wilson is no good ashore!* He [Battenberg] is an intimate personal friend of the German Emperor's brother. He is the most capable administrator in the Admirals List *by a long way*, and he will just '*roll up*' all Admiralty opponents in the Committee of Imperial Defence. (*Sir A. K. Wilson is not Aaron!* — he's Moses! *he only shines at sea!*) Battenberg is Moses and Aaron in one. I think also this should please the Liberal Party — they will say what better proof could we give of our confidence to Germany than selecting a man as First Sea Lord with German proclivities. In reality he is more English than the English. Captain Mark Kerr should be Winston's Private Secretary, as he is the ablest Captain on the Navy List and he's a bosom friend of Battenberg, so Winston will use him to 'engineer' Battenberg in times of friction (*such times must always be!*). Sir George Callaghan, now Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet, should be Second Sea Lord, and Admiral Jerram, now Second-in-Command of the

Mediterranean Fleet, should be Fourth Sea Lord, and he should retain the present Third Sea Lord and Controller (Briggs). These men are the ablest now at sea and give the new Board *Homogeneity — Harmonious — Progressive — Determined*, and ALL fresh from the sea!

Sir A. K. Wilson should be made a Peer.

Send the present Second Sea Lord into Battenberg's place in the Home Fleet.

Send the present Fourth Sea Lord into Jerram's place.

Send the present Private Secretary into Admiral Slade's place in East Indies when shortly vacant.

Move Sir John Jellicoe from the Atlantic Fleet to be Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet *vice* Callaghan, who would come as Second Sea Lord.

And Admiral Burney to Atlantic Fleet *vice* Jellicoe with temporary rank as Vice-Admiral.

SIR JOHN JELLICOE IS THE FUTURE NELSON — he is *incomparably* the ablest Sea Admiral we have — perhaps better than Battenberg — yes, I should say he is — so it's important to get him as Second-in-Command of our main Fleet.

Captain *Ballard* should *at once* succeed Admiral Bethell as Director of Naval Intelligence and Admiral Bethell [get] the first vacant appointment.

If these appointments are made (*and each one hangs on the other, it's a case of all or none*), then Winston can sleep quiet in his bed! (I have used that expression before!)

Yours always,

Fisher

VERY IMPORTANT INDEED to have BALLARD as *D. of I.*[1]

[1] Fisher's 'batting average' was low. The new Board, constituted on November 28th, had Bridgeman, not Battenberg, as First Sea Lord (1911-1912), succeeding Wilson; Battenberg, not Callaghan, as Second Sea Lord (1911-1912), *vice* Egerton, who did not succeed to Battenberg's command in the Home Fleet; Briggs did remain on as Third Sea Lord and Controller, as a link between the old and new Boards (but cf. pp. 415, 417, and p. 415, n. 1.); Captain William C. Pakenham, not Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Martyn Jerram, as Fourth Sea Lord (1911-1913), *vice* Madden, who did not replace Jerram in the Mediterranean. As for Churchill's other early appointments, announced on November 28th, 1911 (Jellicoe, Callaghan, Burney) and January 8th, 1912 (Beatty, Ballard, Troubridge, Jackson, Bethell): Rear-Admiral David (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Earl) Beatty, not Captain (afterwards Admiral) Mark Kerr, became Private (thereafter Naval) Secretary to the First Lord (1912-1913), *vice* Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Ernest C. T. Troubridge, who did not replace Slade in the East Indies. (Troubridge became the first Chief of the War Staff, 1912-1913.) Jellicoe did succeed Callaghan in the command of the 2nd Division of the Home Fleet (i.e., as Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet) (1911-1912), with Callaghan, *vice* Bridgeman, as

328: TO J. A. SPENDER

[October 25th, 1911]

My dear Spender,

I sent you an '*express*' letter early this morning. I wrote hurriedly, BUT IT IS ALL SOUND, and if Winston don't take my advice *he will be a d—d fool!* and make the mistake of his lifetime! *but he must take it ALL* — if he leaves out a single appointment, then the arch will fall in — *each appointment is a 'keystone'*.

IMPRESS THIS ON HIM!!! I will if required come and take my coat [off] for him just as much as for McKenna, because it is *the Navy* and *the Navy alone* I think of. I say to you, '*don't tell McKenna*,' simply because unnecessary, nor do I want him to have the faintest feeling of my not minding his departure. It's a GREAT grief! but no use crying over spilt milk.

An urgent letter has come from Sir Ernest Cassel saying Winston wanted to meet me. PRIVATE. Cassel is Winston's VERY CLOSE friend! I've telegraphed to him in reply that I've sent him (Cassel) an express letter, and in that express letter I've told [him] to induce Winston to follow the advice I have sent him via J. A. Spender of 45 Sloane Street, and that he (Cassel) and Winston are not to mention my writing to a living soul else but you.

Yours in haste,

Fisher

Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet (as Acting Admiral) (1911-1914); Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Cecil Burney did succeed Jellicoe in command of the Atlantic Fleet (as Acting Vice-Admiral) (1911-1912); Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Thomas Jackson, not Captain (afterwards Admiral) George A. Ballard, became Director of the Intelligence Division of the War Staff (new title of the D.N.I.) (1912-1913), *vice* Bethell, who replaced Slade in the East Indies (1912-1913). (Ballard became Director of the Operations Division of the War Staff, 1912-1914.) In the case of Beatty's appointment, Churchill wired Fisher on December 13th, 1911: 'Beatty and Rosie Wemyss [Rear-Admiral Rosslyn E. Wemyss, afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Baron Wester Wemyss] are both suggested to me for Private Secretary. Am inclined to Beatty, but am also considering Napier [Captain (afterwards Admiral) Charles L. Napier]. What do you think from my point of view and the Navy's?' Fisher's wired reply was: 'Napier far best for yourself and Navy. Consider other two undesirable.' It is, however, likely that Fisher changed some of his first recommendations at the Reigate meeting, October 27th-31st. See below, p. 417.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCHILL PERIOD, 1911-1914

ON October 24th, 1911, Churchill and McKenna exchanged offices, McKenna taking over the Home Office. The new First Lord's methods may not always have been popular, but Churchill did possess the invaluable attributes of foresight, courage, and unbounded energy. These assets, coupled with his reliance on Fisher's advice, particularly in technical matters, were productive of tremendous naval progress in the years 1911-1914. Though they had been good friends before 1909, they had not spoken since the squabble over the '8'. This was quickly set right: at Churchill's urgent summons, Fisher slipped into England, October 28th to 30th, for conferences at Reigate Priory with the First Lord and his Cabinet colleagues; around November 17th he returned to England to week-end with Churchill on board the Admiralty yacht *Enchantress* at Plymouth. These 'secret' trips did not appear in the newspapers, but London buzzed all the time Fisher was in England. Fisher 'hated' going to see Churchill, as he felt he would be 'condoning the dirty trick played on McKenna in promoting him out of the Admiralty', and which had made the two men 'poisonous enemies'; but he went when McKenna strongly urged him. Relations, a bit awkward at first, were quickly restored to their former cordiality — on Fisher's side because he realized that the little-navy Churchill of 1909 was no more (he had 'boxed the compass!').

Churchill did not dare to call Fisher back as First Sea Lord. He was apprehensive of the Admiral's age and he feared the revival of the feuds. But finding Fisher 'a veritable volcano of knowledge and of inspiration', he quickly installed the old sea dog as his unofficial adviser and uncrowned First Sea Lord. 'I shall', he wrote Fisher on November 2nd, 'most sedulously endeavour to carry you with me in my administration of the Admiralty; and I have good hopes that I shall succeed, and that you will feel free to be a constant and ready counsellor.' Fisher admired Churchill's 'genius and audacity' and wanted to help him; but he preferred to remain on the Continent and to do what he could in 'obscurity' through correspondence. His reasons were twofold: first, he found it 'very awkward between McKenna and Winston Churchill — like balancing on a tight rope!'

There would, therefore, be less embarrassment if he stayed away from England. In the second place, and more important, he did not want to hurt the susceptibilities of his good friends, Bridgeman, Battenberg, and Pakenham, respectively the First, Second, and Fourth Sea Lords. He did not want to give any appearance of 'intriguing or wirepulling'. In the third place, having been 'the First Violin', he refused to come back to 'play second fiddle! I don't care to be understudy to anyone! *Aut Caesar aut nullus!*' He was deaf to beseeching letters from Churchill, McKenna, Garvin, Esher, and many others to come home permanently. '*J'y suis, j'y reste.*' But he did give Churchill his word that he would come home at once in case of an emergency.

And so there began a long series of Fisher-Churchill letters, the Admiral's closely written eight- to ten-page effusions containing, in Churchill's words, 'every sort of news and counsel, from blistering reproach to supreme inspiration'. They kept coming, usually in response to questions with which Churchill kept 'bombarding' him. 'Many thanks for your letter, which I greatly enjoy and over which I ponder much. As the man wrote about white-leather hunting breeches to his tailor, "keep continually sending".' So begins one of Churchill's letters (January 10th, 1912). And on January 1st, 1914: 'Contact with you is like breathing ozone to me.' As early as November 8th, 1911, Fisher was complaining that he was working as hard in Lucerne as if he were back at the Admiralty. But he loved every moment of it.

There can be no doubt that many of the most significant achievements of the Churchill régime, pre-war, owed much to the ideas and stimulation of Fisher. The relationship of the two men was that of teacher and disciple. It was rumoured at the time that Fisher was Churchill's 'dry nurse', but the extent of the Admiral's influence was not suspected by the service and public opinion at large. Thus, Churchill, with Fisher's advice, support, and occasional nagging, improved the conditions of the bluejackets, so taking some of the edge off lower-deck unrest. In September 1912 he abolished certain humiliating forms of punishment, and in December 1912 he improved the sailors' pay. As regards the complaint of the petty officers and seamen that there were no possibilities of promotion, that only rarely did one become an officer, Churchill in August 1912 made it possible for a number of men from the lower deck to become commissioned officers after two or three years' training.

Miracle of miracles, Fisher apparently had a great deal to do with

the formulation of Churchill's memorandum of January 1st, 1912 (published on the 8th), announcing the formation of a Naval War Staff and outlining its organization. (The functions of the Navy War Council were largely transferred to the Naval War Staff.) Thus, on January 9th, 1912, he confided to his daughter-in-law: 'SECRET. Winston Churchill's manifesto you'll see in Monday's *Times*, I expect! which we don't get till to-morrow night. He has adopted everything I suggested down to the commas!' (But see below, p. 421.) Most of all, Fisher proved stimulating to Churchill in everything that related to ship design.

Three fundamental decisions as regards matériel were made by the Churchill Board. The period was marked, first of all, by the building of a fast division of battleships armed with 15-inch guns and driven by oil fuel. This was the famous 'Queen Elizabeth' class, which gave such a splendid account of itself in the war. In 1909, Fisher had made a revolutionary plunge by increasing the gun-power of the Dreadnoughts from a 12-inch to a 13.5-inch primary armament, so increasing the weight of the shell from 850 lbs. to 1,400 lbs., a projectile 40 per cent (or more) heavier than the biggest fired by the German Fleet. On coming to the Admiralty, Churchill at once planned to go one size better by introducing 15-inch guns hurling a 1,920-lb. projectile for the five dreadnoughts of the 1912 programme. Any doubts he may have had were dispelled by Fisher's enthusiastic support: 'What was it that enabled Jack Johnson to knock out his opponents? It was the big punch.' It took courage to enlarge the gun, since it meant enlarging the size of the ships and increasing the cost, which was bound to meet opposition in the Cabinet. It took still greater courage for the First Lord — on Fisher's advice but against the advice of responsible experts — to order all the 15-inch guns at once instead of waiting for a trial gun to be constructed and tested before placing orders for the lot. This would have meant losing a year. Churchill plunged and everything turned out fine. However, Fisher's opposition to the reintroduction of a 6-inch secondary armament did not prevail over the arguments of the Director of Naval Construction that it was necessitated by the longer range of the new torpedoes and by the danger of guns being damaged in battle.

The next step was the decision to make the five new dreadnoughts a fast division. The big argument was that such a division could 'cross the T' and manœuvre around the German Fleet, whichever way the enemy might deploy, and bring him to bay. Bridgeman

supported the fast division, but Fisher's influence was the decisive one here. He peppered the First Lord with advice. 'Do remember the recipe for jugged hare in Mrs. Glasse's Cookery Book! "First catch your hare!" ' Again: 'Sea fighting is pure common sense. The first of all necessities is SPEED, so as to be able to fight — *When* you like, *Where* you like, and *How* you like.'

Came the third step. To give the fast division 25 knots, an increase of 4 or 5 knots, as recommended by a War College study, fuel oil had to be used. It gave a large excess of speed over coal, enabled that speed to be attained with far greater rapidity, gave 40 per cent greater radius of action for the same weight of coal, and enabled a fleet to refuel at sea with ease. Destroyers were being fired with oil fuel as early as 1905, when H.M.S. *Swift*, first of the 'Tribal' class of destroyers, was laid down. (It is necessary to distinguish between oil-fired — that is, crude oil sprayed into the furnace — and oil internal combustion.) But to build any large additional number of oil-fired ships, especially battleships, meant basing Britain's naval supremacy on oil. This had its dangers, since there was little oil in Great Britain and it could only come from overseas, whereas the finest supply of the best steam coal in the world was right in England. There were also large problems connected with the accumulation of a large oil reserve and the installation of tanks. To change the foundation of the Navy from British coal to foreign oil was a formidable decision. But Churchill thought the gains worth the difficulties and risks. It was the most vital decision he made, and, 'the camel once swallowed, the gnats went down easily enough': oil was adopted for the smaller ships of war.

It was in April 1912 that the decision was reached to include the fast division of five oil-fired super-dreadnoughts in the 1912-1913 estimates. (For reasons we cannot go into here the five 'Royal Sovereigns' of the 1913-1914 programme were coal-burning ships, using oil as an auxiliary.) To solve the many procurement and technical problems involved in the adoption of oil, Churchill proposed to appoint a royal commission. Fisher, the 'Oil Maniac', was its logical chairman. The difficulty was that he had fallen out with Churchill again, this time over appointments. When, in April 1912, Fisher judged that Churchill was 'truckling to the Court' in certain appointments, he refused to work with him any longer.

The First Lord and the Prime Minister were dead set on seeing Fisher in May. When he twice refused to go with them in the *Enchantress* to Alexandria, they begged him with letters and telegrams

to keep himself 'absolutely free' for the several days they proposed to spend with him at Naples, where he had been since Christmas. Fisher gave in. 'If Mahomet comes to the mountain, why the mountain can't well help it!' There followed three hectic days on board the *Enchantress*, May 24th to 26th, which left Fisher '*a wreck!* No sleep and incessant talking!' He was initiated into the plan for a royal commission on oil. Would he accept the chairmanship?

> I've told them *totus porcus* or nothing! and I am not at all keen on the job and, besides, I am not in power to see the thing through, and I don't care to be made a fool of and all one's work wasted by fearfulness to take big steps. Also I am very averse to entering the battlefield again. I've had enough of it! And it's all rot the Prime Minister and Winston thinking I can take it easy and let others do the work! *That's just what I can't do!* (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, May 29th, 1912).

On June 19th he returned to England, and, shortly after, his terms were accepted. He at once disposed of his oil shares (at a loss) and plunged into the work of the Royal Commission on Fuel Oil with characteristic vigour and enthusiasm. 'You know what an admirable chairman he was, and what all the clever men on that Committee thought of him, showing so at the end by the presentation to him of a most appreciative letter of address . . . at which he was much affected.'[1] But as early as July 1st he was wishing he 'had only stayed at Lucerne, [where] I should have been leading the life of an Angel! *Now it's the very devil!* Telegrams pouring in all day!' Work on the Committee of Imperial Defence was also time- and energy-consuming. Some time in July he wrote his son:

> I want a month's holiday. I've been working like a galley-slave ever since June 19th, the day I left Lucerne. I often wish myself back. *Fancy! A dance there every blessed night now!!!* and here I am getting up at 4 a.m. to drudge and slave! I should be just going to bed then if I were at Lucerne!!!

The importance of the work of the Commission buoyed him. 'To the outside man it will appear (as did the submarine and wireless) the help of the weak instead of perhaps the most potent instrument ever yet known in England's favour! (I keep on telling we are the

[1] Admiral Sir Reginald F. H. Henderson to George Lambert, November 4th, 1920. Henderson had served on the Royal Commission.

lost 10 Tribes of Israel, but you won't believe me!!!)' (Fisher to White, August 15th, 1912).

The particular tasks of the Commission were indicated in Churchill's letter to Fisher of June 11th:

> You have got to find the oil: to show how it can be stored cheaply: how it can be purchased regularly and cheaply in peace; and with absolute certainty in war. Then by all means develop its application in the best possible way to existing and prospective ships.[1]

The latter included an investigation of the internal combustion engine and an exploration of the possibility of utilizing it on British ships. The Commission was also to find methods of protecting the oil from air attack.

The Commission had virtually finished its work by early 1913, but was 'kept ambling on' into 1914. The final report was signed on February 10th.

> The climax was reached on July 17th, 1913, when Churchill announced the 'ultimate' naval oil policy, based on the recommendation of the Fisher Commission. It did nothing less than put the Admiralty into the petroleum business. Vast storage facilities were to be constructed; refineries, capable of processing crude oil for the fleet, were to be erected. These would assure a supply of fuel in the event of an emergency, and they would make possible the purchase of crude oil whenever the market was favourable . . . Finally, the policy called for the acquisition of oil fields capable of supplying at least a portion of the demands of the Navy, and until then no more capital ships would be built for oil combustion![2]

Pursuant to this policy, in August 1914 the British Government purchased a controlling share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Fisher had pushed hard for this plan, which probably originated with him. He appreciated that the Persian oil fields were probably the richest in the world and confided to a friend, while the Commission was sitting: 'We must do our d—st to get control of the Anglo-Persian Company, and to keep it for all time, as an absolutely "all-British" Company.'[3] There is, too, this passage in a letter to the Additional Civil Lord, Sir Francis Hopwood, on May 15th, 1913:

[1] Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 132-3.
[2] Joseph E. King: 'The New Broad Arrow: Origins of British Oil Policy', *The Mariner's Mirror*, August 1953.
[3] To Lord Greenway, as cited in Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 158.

> I trust you will push the Persian oil as being now the only avenue left open, as we seem to have lost both California and Deterding with their past large offers on favourable terms of suitable oil fuel. Like the Foolish Virgin in the Bible *the door is now shut and you can't get the oil anywhere!*

On October 8th, 1913, we find the Admiral writing to Arnold White: 'When I've wound up this Royal Commission and given a final kick to some dozen other Big Things that I am working at *à la* mole, I mean to divide my year between Langham House [Ham Common], Marienbad, Tremezzo [Lombardy], and Monte Carlo, and never let go the sun!'

These 'Big Things' involved much 'fierce fighting' and included his strong advocacy of (1) the internal combustion engine, in which oil could be used with much greater efficiency; (2) a 25-knot battleship, so engined as to be capable of circling the globe without refuelling; (3) a 'score' of Channel tubes between Dover and Calais (like the Bakerloo Tube under the Thames) to bring in food and oil in war-time and serve as a preventive against a shipping panic that might otherwise follow the probably large number of initial captures; (4) more submarine construction and improved types; (5) guns in merchant ships; (6) military aircraft.

Fisher got results only on points (5) and (6). In 1913 the Admiralty began to arm merchantmen. As regards aircraft, in the winter of 1908-1909 Fisher had pressed the Committee of Imperial Defence to approve the construction of airships for naval purposes. The C.I.D., impressed with their 'scouting and possibly destructive purposes', recommended (January 28th, 1909) that the Admiralty build one airship of a rigid type (Zeppelin). It was begun in the summer, but was a failure when completed in 1910. Out of office, Fisher's interest was transferred to aeroplanes. Thus, to Sir Charles Parsons he wrote on September 17th, 1912: 'I repeat again to you that perhaps the most eminent man in science said not so long ago that aeroplanes were "*a physical impossibility*", and they are now flying over the garden here like sparrows in these manœuvres.' Churchill did not need much encouragement. When he became First Lord, there were four aeroplanes in the Naval Air Service. By the spring of 1914 the Navy had 103 aeroplanes, of which 62 were seaplanes. In addition, there were 15 airships, built, building, and ordered. In June 1914 the Naval Wing of the Royal Flying Corps was transformed into the Royal Naval Air Service, a distinct branch of the Royal Navy. And up to

1914 the Navy was ahead of the Army in its realization of the potentialities of aircraft and in the development of those potentialities. Whereas the War Office saw chiefly the reconnaissance possibilities in aircraft, Churchill and Fisher conceived wider uses. As the First Lord announced in the House of Commons, March 17th, 1914, some of the functions which the seaplanes and aeroplanes of the Naval Wing were expected to discharge were scouting at sea (either from the land or from a seaplane ship), watching the coast, and defending vulnerable points.

In July 1914, after the Admiral had made all arrangements to start on August 1st for Marienbad, he was at the last moment requested by 'the higher powers' to postpone going, as he was wanted. In those days, when war clouds were already gathering, he was in close consultation with the Admiralty. At the grand naval review of July 17th-18th, Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, Second-in-Command of the 2nd Battle Squadron, said to a naval journalist: 'All that is best and most modern here is the creation of Lord Fisher.' This tribute takes on added significance when we remember that Arbuthnot, a strong and independent character, had never been in the 'Fishpond'. Armageddon was about to put this Fleet to the severest test in its proud and ancient history.

329: TO MRS. CECIL FISHER

Grand Hotel National
Lucerne
October 31st, 1911

My sweet Jane,

I don't know if you authorized Cecil to tell me what he did in his delightful letter that I got yesterday, but it has given us *tremendous joy*! . . . It was a bitter, *very bitter* disappointment not coming to Kilverstone, and I send you the enclosed, which you can burn, to show you I am in hot water also with Beatrix and Pamela.[1] But it was considered desirable to hide the fact that I had been summoned home to give advice to a new First Lord, as, of course, it's somewhat of a reflection on Sir A. Wilson. I had a wonderful time at Reigate. Very lovely females there -- one of them, Mrs. John Jacob Astor, I don't think so very handsome as people make out she is. I think I was victorious. Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Lord Haldane,

[1] Pamela (Mrs. Henry Blackett), the Admiral's youngest daughter.

and Sir Rufus Isaacs — about as clever, each one, as you will find anywhere all the world over! However, I was in excellent form and got on splendidly.

I really do feel ever so much younger than I did a year ago. I think it is entirely due to all the dancing I have had here. *Private.* I've promised to come home again before Christmas, if pressed to do so, and nothing will stop me coming to see you next time! Heaven bless you, my sweet Jane, and be very happy, as we all love you very much.

Your loving father,

F.

Send my love to Cecil when you write and tell him his letter was lovely *because of you!*

330: TO J. A. SPENDER

Lucerne
October 31st, 1911

Secret

My beloved Spender,

Your letter dealt with as directed. (What a thousand pities these sort of letters have to be destroyed! *What does Bagehot say about it?*) Of course you must have a holiday, but I feel as if we were losing our sheet-anchor! Your letter about the military intrigue has been confirmed from another source.

I've had a time of it with Winston, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ PATHETIC HOURS WITH MCKENNA! I went to the Priory Reigate Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Winston, Lloyd George, Haldane, Rufus Isaacs — *they had me all the time!* It was a 'put up' job! However, I didn't make a slip. I was up till 2 a.m. with Winston. *He's a genius without doubt!* He was very affectionate, and so was Lloyd George. But ON THE WHOLE I'm sorry I went! I rather feel as if I have condoned the d—d dirty trick played McKenna! Winston agreed with my view that I stated as regards the Navy. WILL HE ACT THEREON? He says he'll make a great public show of being cordial with Beresford and his clique! and hoped I wouldn't mind! Of course it's all a slap at McKenna. Winston takes his oath to me he was guiltless as regards replacing McKenna.

But I am now writing to you to ask if, before you go [on a holiday], any sort of campaign can be organized to overthrow these military

gentlemen. Winston and Lloyd George are both in it with the soldiers! It's the most extraordinary incident I ever knew of for these two special men to have become practically aiders and abettors of Conscription, because that is the end of it. THEY WOULD NOT READ YOUR ARTICLE OF SATURDAY, *in which you turned the tables so beautifully!* I took the paper to them and they neither would read it![1]

Of course keep all this secret! Winston does not like my being thick with you!!! Never let this out. He is wonderfully intimate with me and opens all his heart.

Yours always,

Fisher

Please post enclosed to McKenna, as Winston says I am watched and that my letters are opened by the French Government. This is very private. D—N THEIR EYES *if they open this!*

P. S. He is going to send a special messenger with his letters to me and mine to him. *Keep all this secret.*

331: TO REAR-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES OTTLEY

Lucerne
November 4th, 1911

Dear Ottley,

When I was First Sea Lord, I wrote a private note to Cromer and asked him to dig out a Dreadnought channel into the harbour of Alexandria, and diverted two of the best dredgers and our very best dredging Master for that purpose. Cromer was splendid. It cost a large sum of money, but was so craftily done that the world at large to this day has no idea of the stupendous feat thus accomplished without a single newspaper ever quoting it. Alexandria before was not accessible in all weathers even to a second-class cruiser – the *Undaunted* grounded in the channel. My idea at that time was to shift Malta to Alexandria. Had I remained First Sea Lord, I think it would have been done. Islam is the key of the British Empire and

[1] The leader referred to (*Westminster Gazette*, October 28th) asserted that it would be disastrous to divert 'money and energy from Navy to Army . . . The military answer, of course, will be that what is proposed would entail only a very slight increase of the existing estimates . . . if we may judge from the uses for which our militarists desire to form their conscript Army, we need not have the slightest doubt that we should be led on . . . to higher and higher levels of expenditure . . . the money would be withdrawn from the Navy, and the public would be taught the false and dangerous doctrine that a smaller margin of sea-strength would suffice, if only our Army were a big one.'

Alexandria is the key of Islam. When Islam holds up its little finger, it's d—d uncomfortable for us in Egypt, India, and Persia. I casually mentioned this idea of mine to Winston last week and he swallowed it whole. This morning he writes to me and asks if it should not be brought before a special committee of the C.I.D. Certainly not, if A.K.W. is on the committee or while he is First Sea Lord. I just write it all to you to let you know what is going on. You may not agree with me. To put all these soldiers now at Malta in Egypt would be a good thing! Some people will talk d—d rot about leaving Malta defenceless! *If you defend everything, you defend nothing!* and what is the good of the French Entente if you don't utilize it?

Yours,

Fisher

332: TO JOHN LEYLAND

Lucerne
November 7th, 1911

Private. Please burn.

My beloved Leyland,

Sir E. Seymour is pestiferous![1] He is playing up to the King and to the 'snobs', who all think it's ungentlemanly to be an Engineer and are doing their utmost to ruin the Navy by calling those of the new scheme Midshipmen 'greasers' who evince any partiality towards engineering knowledge! Seymour was twice passed over as a Rear-Admiral for employment because he was a soft ass. In a misguided moment I persuaded Lord George Hamilton to employ him.[2] He now bites the hand that fed him! . . .

With much reluctance I obeyed an urgent summons and spent Saturday, Sunday, and Monday in a country house at Reigate with Winston and other Cabinet Ministers. I had no sleep for four nights — when I wasn't talking I was writing. My brain was buzzing like a hive of bees! They all fell on my neck and kissed me! Time will show if they are liars. I left them with an assurance that all was well.

[1] Admiral of the Fleet (ret.) Sir Edward Seymour's article, 'The Navy and Its Engineers' (*Navy*, November 1911), anticipated a considerable modification in the Selborne Scheme of 1902 as it concerned the engineer officers. 'I maintain that no naval officer can approach proficiency in all the branches of his profession, the mere effort to do so would turn many a man into a "Jack of all trades, and master of none".'

[2] Lord George Hamilton was First Lord of the Admiralty, 1885-1886, 1886-1892. Seymour became a rear-admiral in 1889, but was on half-pay until 1892, when he hoisted his flag as Second-in-Command of the Channel Squadron. Fisher had joined the Board as Third Sea Lord and Controller in 1892.

Letters and telegrams have followed me here confirming, but I never yet saw a politician who was not an '*opportunist*', except McKenna, and he twice threw up and walked out of the Cabinet for the good of the Navy, but they have got even with him at last! That was why I was reluctant to meet his enemies (*d—n them!*). But I made a point of spending 3½ hours with McKenna while Winston was waiting for me! *Please burn all this!* Personally it's good for McKenna, for his health was giving way.

I had left a secret memorandum gradually developing the War Council at the Admiralty (which I started before I left) into a War Staff, the War College at Portsmouth being the germ of it all. Winston has swallowed it whole. The argument for a War Staff is that you MAY have a d—d fool as First Sea Lord, and so you put him in commission, as it were. But if there's a Barham as First Sea Lord,[1] he'll run the war, and no one else! I never told anyone my real plan of war; no more would A.K.W., but A.K.W., not being a Machiavelli, wouldn't tell the Cabinet anything. I, on the contrary, told them so much that they thought me perfect. I gave them 600 pages of print of war plans!

A. K. Wilson is a very great man! Beresford & Co. are trying to discredit him. Both in strategy and tactics A.K.W. rolled up every Admiral ever pitted against him, and his fighting views are absolutely impregnable. That skunk Repington wrote letters to Cabinet Ministers maligning Wilson and questioning the readiness of the Fleet [at the time of Agadir]. The German Emperor knew its readiness; so did the whole mercantile community of Germany. Their fear was that England would force France to fight! I have all this *absolutely at first hand!*

Please keep all this for yourself, but fight for A. K. Wilson and McKenna when you get the opportunity. You won't be wrong.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

333: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Lucerne
November 8th, 1911

My ever dear Friend,

. . . Winston Churchill gave me the verbatim words of the King to him, which do not tally with your idea of the King's sentiments

[1] Admiral the first Baron Barham, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1805.

towards Churchill.[1] *It's a d—d wicked world! That's all I've got to say!!!*

Well! I am getting exceeding cordial letters and telegrams from Winston Churchill, and he told a friend of mine that he had determined to lean on me mainly, but it was quite obvious that I was to be told this, so it's not what I call a heartfelt exposition of his intentions. Lloyd George seems to be my special friend, which I don't understand. Six months ago Rufus Isaacs said something to me to that effect! I admit it was a good thing I went to Reigate. Napoleon B. slobbered over me, but don't the cobra do that before he swallows his victim? I think Winston did him in the eye over the Admiralty. It was a flash of genius that it would never do to have the First Lord a Peer![2] I am assured that Winston Churchill had no hand at all in the conspiracy against you. I rather think you told me that also. Apparently Winston was meant for the War Office. But I only get all this in a very roundabout way.

I don't know whether Winston is just 'fooling' Beresford or whether he is really bargaining with him. Anyhow, as I told you, I was quite explicit with Winston as to what I should do if we didn't hit it off,[3] and he said, 'It would be d—d awkward'. He asked me if I would come home. I said I must think it over. I would prefer to stand aloof. I am afraid my indignation is worse than your own at the dirty low way we have been tricked, and I would like to show myself as standing out with you by not being mixed up publicly with Admiralty affairs. With reluctance I gave my advice at Reigate and apparently it caught on. I think I have done enough. . . .

Yours for evermore,

F.

[1] 'I know . . . that the King did not relish Churchill at the Admiralty' (McKenna to Fisher, November 5th, 1911). But the King had written Fisher (October 31st): 'Personally I believe Churchill will do well at the Admiralty and that he has entirely changed his views about cutting down in the Navy.'

[2] Apparently the post of First Lord was originally designated for Haldane, and then Harcourt, Churchill's friend, suddenly discovered that the First Lord ought not to be a peer (Spender to Fisher, November 1st, 1911, and Fisher's marginal note on same).

[3] 'Winston wants me to ride two horses at the same time – Beresford and self. I told him to try it – nothing like a nasty fall!' (Fisher to Fiennes, November 3rd, 1911).

334: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Lucerne
Secret November 9th, 1911

My beloved E.,

These are very ticklish times indeed! I have got to be extremely careful. I must not get between Winston and A.K.W. in any way — it would not only be very wrong, but fatal to any smooth working. So I begged Winston not to write to me. With extreme reluctance I went to Reigate as I did, but McKenna urged me on the grounds of the good of the Navy, and from what Winston has since said to a friend of mine I think I did right in going. Also I got a very cordial letter from the King praising me for going, which is perhaps a good thing.

But why I am writing to you now is to entreat you to *make sure* with the Prime Minister that Hankey succeeds Ottley if there is any change. This is VERY, VERY secret. But you know Hankey's great value! I feel you are the only one who could see this through, so I write. *I consider it absolutely vital for the future of the C.I.D.!*[1]

Yours in haste, F.

Winston promised me he would do his utmost for Hankey if any change, but you know what politicians are!

335: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Lucerne
Secret November 10th, 1911

Please burn.

My dear Arnold White,

. . . There's a d—d pernicious report being spread that A. K. Wilson had no war plan and that the English Fleet was not ready! To throw rotten eggs at the man who undoubtedly will be our Admiralissimo for the next 5 years certain is simply damnable! He has 'rolled up' every Admiral and every combination of Admirals ever pitted against him for about 9 years on end (and Beresford with all his satellites most of all!), both in strategy and tactics, and his dispositions of the Fleet were all studied and perfect. As I believe I

[1] 'You may rely upon my looking after Hankey, but Ottley is NOT to leave the C.I.D. It would never do. I have talked to him very seriously on the subject' (Esher to Fisher, November 11th, 1911).

am the only one he ever trusted with his plans, I can speak. But you see how secret this is, and you must never breathe a word. But that skunk Repington hates A.K.W. for having steam-rollered him with his famous memorandum on 'Invasion,' and wrote a lot of d—d nonsense in private letters to Cabinet Ministers; hence this pernicious lie. I need not say to you that A.K.W. has not been polite. It's not his way. He can't suffer fools gladly. However, no use troubling you with that, but I do feel murderous at Wilson's incomparable value to the Empire being belittled by a d—d pimp of the War Office who gets £500 a year from them (as Editor of the War Office Journal), as Military Correspondent of *The Times*, to exasperate Germany by chucking mud at her Army! . . .

Yours always,

F.

336: TO REGINALD AND PAMELA MCKENNA

Lucerne
Private November 22nd, 1911

My very dear Friends,

It was indeed kind of you both to come and see me off. I thought I was going to miss my train — I had only that minute arrived — and there really was nothing to tell you beyond technical details of new designs, where I am most deadly opposed to what apparently had been decided on as the latest design, but as I never had any confidence in Briggs, I was not surprised. He is a servile copyist, and d—d timid into the bargain![1] *However, I am not going to chuck any stone at him, as they might hit you!* But I've written quite a friendly letter to old Watts to tell him he's a d—d fool! Only a senile ass would fail to see that if 21-inch torpedoes are carried in numbers, as in the latest German battleships, with ten submerged tubes, the era of the Big Gun is more firmly established than ever when the torpedo (so the Torpedo Lieutenant of the *Monarch* told me he had seen) ranges effectively for 5 miles (10,000 yards!). However, why should I worry you with my astonishment at the astounding idiocy of practically reverting to a secondary armament!

[1] 'We want a new Controller and a new D.N.O.! Both as timid as rabbits and as silly as ostriches' (Fisher to Jellicoe, November 30th, 1911). Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Archibald G. H. Moore was Director of Naval Ordnance, 1909-1912, in succession to Bacon. He succeeded Briggs as Third Sea Lord and Controller in June 1912 (-1914). Fisher's wrath was probably due to the return of an intermediate armament (6-inch guns) in the dreadnoughts of the 1912 programme.

Please don't mention a syllable as to Ottley being denied to W.C. as Chief of War Staff. Perhaps it may yet come off! *I don't know!*[1] If so, it will be splendid for Hankey. There was nothing fixed about anything of a definite nature when I left W.C. I only follow your dictum that for the good of the Navy I am bound to do all I possibly can to further and foster good resolutions. As the Admiralty must soon begin Estimates, there must soon be a policy.

My best love to you both.

Yours affectionately, Fisher

337: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Lucerne
[late November 1911]

Secret. Please burn.

My dear Friend,

. . . My two private visits to Winston were fruitful. I tell you (AND YOU ONLY!) the whole secret of the changes! *To get Jellicoe Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet prior to October 21, 1914,* which is the date of the Battle of Armageddon. He will succeed Callaghan automatically in two years from December 19, 1911, so will have all well in hand by the before-mentioned date! '*Nunc dimittis*'![2] *Everything revolved round Jellicoe!* If ever you breathe a word, *I can never forgive you!* NO ONE sees it *and I don't want them to!*

Winston presses me to pay him another visit. I have refused. I have spent six days and nights with him, and he is saturated. He will do well. HE IS BRAVE. He dropped A.K.W. like Wilhelm dropped Bismarck. The cases were identical. You will understand! You instinctively hit the nail on the head. Young Admirals at sea are an imperative necessity. Physical endurance is vital. *Voilà!* Callaghan and Jellicoe! and all must be junior to the last-named.

It's curious work being a mole! I don't want to get trapped and skinned, so don't give me away!

If Beresford is dead in the Country, as Lady St. Helier tells you, why does every newspaper (including *The Times*) publish his speeches *in extenso*?

[1] It did not. Troubridge became the first Chief of the War Staff, 1912-1913.

[2] '*Nunc dimittis*' are the opening words in the Latin version of the Song of Simeon (Luke ii, 29-32), a canticle sung in the Evening Service of the Church of England.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart
In peace, according to thy word:
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, etc.

Is it in the faintest degree conceivable that A. K. Wilson was unready? I am perhaps the only person in the world who ever knew his war plan (he told the Defence Committee so!). *And in five seconds he would have pounced!* But he had the sagacity to see that the Germans would have been simply mad to fight, so he slept quiet in his bed while Repington was inspecting the Home Fleet! And Cabinet Ministers receiving letters from a discredited soldier as to how the Fleet ought to fight! Of course we are the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. There is no other explanation why the British Empire don't sink!

Yours,

F.

338: TO MRS. CECIL FISHER

Lucerne
December 2nd, 1911

My dear sweet Jane!

. . . *Yes, I have really had an immense triumph over* [the constitution of] *the Board of Admiralty.* The King quite thought he had arranged for Sir John Durnford[1] to be First Sea Lord. *This is very private, of course,* and Sir John Fullerton[2] actually telegraphed out to Eric [Fullerton] in the *Triumph* that it was settled. Then again, Sir William May, who is a renegade, also thought he was sure. No one suspected any of the new men. I would have gone further and got rid of the one that has been kept [Briggs], as he is a poor fool. I always warned McKenna he was stupid in his selections; but he thought himself so paramount as to be able to neglect his colleagues. In the end they wrecked him, and dear old Wilson, though splendid and unsurpassed, was not a Machiavelli, and these lawyers in the Cabinet just 'walked round' him! '*Similia similibus curantur.*' When a cunning rogue talks at you, you must talk back at him! Dear old Wilson only smiled! That ain't enough in this wicked world!

Winston Churchill has again, two days ago, pressed me to pay him another private visit. I don't think it's judicious. I am letting it stand over. The greater your friends, the more careful you ought to be of their susceptibilities. Bridgeman, Battenberg, and Pakenham all know I got them there. I don't want to rub their noses in it!

[1] Admiral Sir John Durnford, unemployed since the termination of his appointment as President of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, in March 1911.

[2] Admiral (ret.) Sir John Fullerton, father-in-law of Dorothy Fisher Fullerton and for many years commanding officer of the royal yacht *Victoria & Albert.*

The greatest triumph of all is getting Jellicoe Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet. He is the future Nelson SURE. Sir Berkeley Milne, a serpent of the lowest type, thought he was sure; he went to Balmoral and crawled. He also got knocked out! Old Stead told me to remember Nebuchadnezzar. So I do!

Fondest love to you both.

Your loving father, F.

339: FROM ADMIRAL SIR FRANCIS BRIDGEMAN

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 4th, 1911

Dear Lord Fisher,

Thanks very much for your letter and what you kindly say. It came as a great surprise and I am *very* sorry to give up the Fleet with all its splendid officers and men. We were getting on famously with internal reforms, etc., much needed! Winston seemed very anxious about my coming and thanked me profusely, which he need not have done, because all I want is to help things along if I can. I see some of the press are not very complimentary about me, and say 'not much need be expected of me', 'but perhaps as Battenberg is there things will go all right'! That comes of being modest! They also are very kind in sending me their cuttings, which otherwise I should not have seen! I am afraid Wilson feels going in this sort of way bitterly, but he tries not to show it.

Churchill is strongly on the economy line. I trust he will not go too far; but he is very clever and full of new schemes of strategy, which are almost too bold to be believed! However, he is very pleasant with it all and seems determined to get on with his Board!

You may perhaps wonder why I came! Two reasons forced me to do it:

First, within the Admiralty there were designs for wrecking the whole scheme of education. That had to be stopped, and I saw no means of doing so other than coming here myself.

Second, I do feel that I was perhaps needlessly standing in the way of younger men, who it's very desirable should go ahead! So long as I remained, there could be no real advancement for, say, Jellicoe. Directly I go, up he comes automatically to command of the 2nd Division, and a splendid opportunity for him! He has had no experience of fleet work on a big scale, and is so extremely anxious

about the work in it, that he really does too much. He must learn to work his captains and staff more, and himself less! At present he puts himself in the position of, say, a glorified gunnery lieutenant. This will not do when he gets with a big fleet. He must trust his staff and captains, and if they don't fit, he must kick them out! I am sure you will agree with me on this view, and I wish, if you get the opportunity, you would drop him a hint. He would take it from you, but perhaps not from me.

Our kindest remembrances to Lady Fisher.

Yours very sincerely, F. B. Bridgeman

My wife is in tears at my leaving the Home Fleet.

340: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Lucerne
December 5th, 1911

Private

My dear Angel,

Your joint letter has just come! 'The hand is the hand of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob'! Now I will give you the whole effect of what has happened in one word!

'JELLICOE!'

I say '*Nunc dimittis*'! For in two years he will be Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet at the same time as Battenberg becomes First Sea Lord, owing to Bridgeman's age-retirement. The Battle of Armageddon comes along in September 1914. That date suits the Germans, if ever they are going to fight. Both their Army and Fleet then mobilized, and the Kiel Canal finished, and their new building complete. *So I sleep quiet in my bed!* — as to all else whatever! All is swallowed up in Jellicoe being NOW Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet. I've had a lovely letter from Callaghan about Jellicoe which adds to my heavenly feelings on the subject.

My last visit confirmed me that W. C. absolutely innocent of any part in the dirty business about you. I yet do not understand it. I am absolutely sure there is very bitter disappointment that Durnford is not First Sea Lord! I think when the *Medina* left England it was looked on as certain![1] But please keep this a profound secret. Any-

[1] The P. & O. liner *Medina*, taking the King and Queen to India, had left England on November 11th.

how, I am exceedingly glad that May is not there, for more reasons than when we last discussed him! The fact of these new Sea Lords being great friends of mine again makes me exceedingly shy of coming home. I don't think you need have the very least doubt but that the Defence Committee will be all right, as I rather fancy B. [Bridgeman] is to be on it, as well as his colleague [Battenberg], *but this is a pure guess of mine* — you see I am in an undetermined state! Bridgeman, Battenberg, and Pakenham are all quite certain to write to me. I will see what they say to me, and I will write you again and tell you my plans.

Yours,

Fisher

341: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE[1]

Lucerne
December 13th, 1911

Your splendid pushing of the submarines has borne good fruit. I hope you will encourage Winston when you see him to put a dozen in the new Estimates.

My heart is set on a new type and it is practicable.

Cost: £1,995,000.

Speed: 30 knots.

Armament: Eight 15-inch guns and 10 submerged tubes. *Reduce armour* and let 'SIZE AND SUBDIVISION' be immensely developed. The new White Star is 1,000 feet long! Don't worry about docks! When the *Hawke* rammed the *Olympic*[2] and made a hole big enough for a coach and horses to get through, the *Olympic* might have gone straight on to New York with her filled compartments. She was practically unaffected. I hear from Elswick no anxiety whatever in manufacturing 15-inch guns without a trial gun. *But, really, speed is absolutely everything!* No worry about bottom being dirty or extra weights with that great preponderance of speed which enables you to fight WHEN you like, WHERE you like, and HOW you like! And this armament I mention to you makes an increase of *63* per cent in gun-power! Also, I strongly advocate oil alone. The new American battleships are to be oil alone! Consider the reduction of personnel

[1] The beginning and end of this letter are missing.

[2] The White Star liner *Olympic*, bound for Cherbourg and New York, and H.M. cruiser *Hawke*, collided in the Solent on September 19th, 1911. There was no loss of life, but both vessels were much damaged.

and the increased radius of action and no going into harbour to coal! *The advantages are prodigious*, and one British company alone (the Shell Transport) has over *two hundred thousand tons of oil* ALWAYS *in transit on every ocean!* peripatetic oiling stations for our ships in every sea to be fed by. Do ram this down Winston's throat.

342: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Lucerne
December 14th, 1911

Private
My dear Angel,

Four hurricanes crossing the Channel have been enough for me, besides balancing on the tight rope to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of the Sea Lords past and present, and therefore I've declined another invitation from W.C. to pay him a further visit, and we are off to Naples next Wednesday, December 20th, to the Hotel Excelsior, for the weather has suddenly got cold here, though still a delicious sun and lovely weather, but at Naples it's 70° in the shade, and white trousers!

I have not heard about the War Staff, but it don't interest me. All I cared for and worked for was that Jellicoe should be Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet on December 19th, 1913, and THAT now is automatically fixed.

I don't always see the papers now, but apparently Beresford is still making mischievous speeches and blackening the character of A. K. Wilson by inferring that he was incompetent to deal with sudden war — at least that is the précis of his speech. His friends, I hear, seem certain of his being Admiral of the Fleet on the return of the *Medina*! I wonder if Count Napoleon B. Fosco[1] is in that job! His elephantine sinuosities quite elude my feeble grasp of the human passions! *I have got it all down in my reminiscences.* The surreptitious visits to [Beresford at] Claridge's, the Press dinner the night before the issue of the Beresford Report, the tampering with the original draft which pulverized Beresford, etc., etc. It will be extremely exciting for him if he (Napoleon B.) outlives me! But they (the Beresfordians) are all '*on the beach*' now, and I begin to think it probably has saved your Reggie's life, having moved from the Admiralty.

[1] Count Fosco was the villainous Italian in Wilkie Collins's novel, *The Woman in White* (1860). 'Count Napoleon B[onaparte] Fosco' was, of course, Haldane.

He would have had an exhausting and most damnable time of it both inside the Admiralty as well as out of it. '*All things come to those who wait*'! If I were your dear Reggie, I wouldn't lift a little finger about anything.

Yours affectionately,

F.

343: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Lucerne
[ca. December 20th, 1911]

Dear Angel!

Fancy! I had just bought a Christmas card to send you, when lo! your letter comes! *I love you and your letters!* CAN I SAY MORE? Till I die you are both the very best and dearest friends of my life! COULD I SAY LESS? You are the solitary recipient of my picture outside my own family. I am not going to give one to anyone else in the world. I'm glad you like it.

As to your question about Napoleon B. and W.C., I said to Winston quite frankly that an unerring instinct — the fruits of a hard life — made me doubt his friend [Haldane], whom he asked amongst others to meet me at Reigate. He replied: 'Yes, the old Jesuit! but I have a compact with him he won't harm me!' *Burn this!* I only repeat his words to let you see his state of mind.

But you may '*sleep quiet in your bed*' on the war circle. I've been in full and detailed correspondence with Bridgeman and Battenberg, and I've promised to come if required to 'smash up' any 'Anti-Naval Cabal' such as Count Napoleon B. Fosco has undoubtedly been an accessory to. He can lie that he has not, like he did to Metternich that he absolutely knew nothing of any military expedition (I mean on a former occasion when I saw King Edward, and the King put his foot down!).

W. C. is aggrieved at my not coming again to stay with him as invited, but he is very affectionate and cordial, and 40 words of telegram passed between us two days ago. . . .

I am very reassured by your statement as to Beresford not being made an Admiral of the Fleet. You would know of it too late! However, I don't bother about it, but I distrust pledges from your friend.

Yours,

F.

344: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Hotel Pellegrino
Bologna
December 20th, 1911

Dearest Cis,

We are here in the most awful hole I ever was in! Mother insisted on coming to this hotel because Charles V was born here or lived here 600 years ago (I should have thought it was much older by the smells, and there's no water in the W.C.!), and the wine we had at dinner reminded me of old Vavasseur's.[1] I objected to it and the proprietor explained it had been several hundred years in bottle. In fact, the whole place is Rip Van Winkle! and nothing will induce me ever to give in again to Mother's crave for ancient history. (Thank goodness we are going to an hotel at Naples only just built!) I had an amusing time of it buying refreshments to-day, as I asked for a church instead of cheese. I thought *chiesa* was the Italian for 'cheese'; anyhow, it is in German, and they might have known what I meant. . . .

I think the meanest thing I've ever known of in my life is the Duke of Fife giving £100 to the French sailors' widows who rescued them.[2] He's as rich as Croesus and ought to have given £20,000! I know the man who owned the home he now has, and my friend asked the house agent who the low Jew was who was bargaining with him about the price!

Your loving father,

F.

345: TO GERARD FIENNES

Excelsior Hotel
Naples
December 26th, 1911

Private

Dear Fiennes,

Your letter just come. I plunge at once *in medias res*. Have no fear about the Defence Committee. All is adequately arranged to squash

[1] Josiah Vavasseur (d. 1908), one of the directors of Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Company. His heir was Cecil Fisher, who was left the Kilverstone estate of 3,000 acres on condition that he adopt the name and arms of Vavasseur.

[2] The Duke and Duchess of Fife (she was the Princess Royal, eldest of King Edward's daughters) and their two daughters were among the passengers of the P. & O. liner *Delhi* who had barely escaped with their lives in a wreck off the Moroccan coast, December 13th. Three seamen of the French cruiser *Friant*, which had a prominent part in the rescue operation, had drowned.

the Generals without any necessity for my appearing on the scene. I saw to this when at home. The Naval Members have been re-arranged. You will see in *The Times* report of the meeting of Thursday, December 14, that the Second Sea Lord attended, as well as the First Sea Lord.

I've had a hectic time — 4 hurricanes crossing the English Channel — so when Winston asked me to come the third time *à la* Nicodemus, I said I'd see him d—d first. So I think he is coming here (but *this is sacredly private*). (When the Mountain would not come to Mahomet, why, Mahomet went to the Mountain!)

The sweet thing in the Admiralty Revolution is that not a soul has discovered what it all ABSOLUTELY and SOLELY pivoted on! (AND DON'T YOU TELL ANY ONE!) Jellicoe to be Admiralissimo on October 21, 1914, when the Battle of Armageddon comes along! He automatically becomes Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet in 2 years' time! Of course, the lovely thing about it was that 16 Admirals were scrapped![1] So I got my knife into some old friends all right! Jellicoe about the same age as Nelson at Trafalgar and possesses all Nelson's attributes except Lady Hamilton, and there I sympathize with him!

Three letters this morning (*they come in shoals*) for me to come home. I hope you won't think me egotistical, but I don't care about playing Second Fiddle when for so long I had the First Violin! Also, I remember the very greatest of all the great Napoleonic sayings, '*I command or I hold my tongue*'! . . .

Did you see an excellent short letter in the *Navy* from Sir John Hopkins about the curl for the Engineers. It was the one mistake I made not doing it when their titles were altered, but like a d—d fool I listened to advice, which is the very worst thing ever to do![2] . . .

Yours always,

F.

[1] Fisher several times refers, in letters of this time, to the 'scrapping' of sixteen (or sometimes 'a dozen') admirals. The wording was exaggerated. Jellicoe, who was twenty-first in seniority on the active list of twenty-two vice-admirals, was moved into the choice appointment over the heads of those with greater seniority.

[2] Admiral Hopkins's letter (December 1911) read: 'I am of the opinion that Sir Edward Seymour is entirely wrong in thinking that the present class of Engineers consider the additional title of Lieut., Commander, Captain, etc. a mockery, though it appears to me a pity that the further step was not taken of giving them at the same time the executive curl of distinction on their uniform.' In 1903, as part of the Selborne Scheme, the engineer officers of the Royal Navy, until then designated Assistant Engineers, Engineers, Chief Engineers, Staff Engineers, Fleet Engineers, and so on, were given the titles of (Engineer) Sub-Lieutenant, Lieutenant, Commander, Captain, and so on. They wore the same rows of distinction lace on the sleeve as did their colleagues of the executive branch, but did not have the ring on the upper row of lace. This ring, known as the 'executive curl', was granted to engineer officers in 1915, when Fisher was again First Sea Lord.

346: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
January 3rd, 1912

Secret. PLEASE BURN.

My beloved E.,

Your always welcome letters just come! I fully agree with you about the Navy want of first-class intellects.[1] Concentration and discipline combine to cramp the Sea Officer. B. [Battenberg] is really a *commis-voyageur*, for instance! Great views don't get grasped.

Winston urges me to come back, but he forgets the greatest of all the great Napoleonic sayings: '*J'ordonne, ou je me tais.*' Besides, you see, I was the First Violin! However, Winston is *splendidly receptive.* I can't possibly write what has happened, but he is a *brave man!* . . .

I have urged Winston to some more 'big strokes' and I think they will come off. They will please you. As I've told you before, the War Staff don't trouble me. *If there's war, one man at the Admiralty will run the war! Don't you make any mistake about that certain fact!*[2] But the War Staff is an exceedingly useful body to be kicked and to deal with d—d rot! and make out schemes for the German Emperor to have next morning at breakfast! There's not a secret paper in the War Office! Every child in the country knows the War Office recent plans. Even Beresford does! He was here the other day, on his way to Egypt, for some complaint. I forget the name. It's what ladies have after having a baby!

Heaven bless you, my best of friends on earth. . . .

Yours always,

F.

[1] Esher had written on December 31st: '*Entre nous*, Prince Louis is NOT a first-class intellect. He may be the best of an indifferent lot.' This passage is omitted from the printed version of the letter in *Esher*, III, 76-7. See below, p. 459, n. 1.

[2] Esher commented (January 9th): 'I agree with everything you say. The War Staff was wanted to give confidence – which is sadly lacking just now in the Board of Admiralty – and it will do this. Nothing can ever prevent *the man* taking hold of the tiller, if there happens to be *a man* about at the crucial moment. I do not see one just now' (*Esher*, III, 78).

347: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL[1]

Naples
January 16th, 1912

Of course there can be no moment's doubt that you ought to chuck the two 'Dartmouths' and the *Blonde* and take four 'Frenzies' in lieu. I hope you won't hesitate! You are forced by the general consensus of opinion to have these useless warships, and this therefore is your wisest choice. I say to you deliberately that *aviation* has entirely dispensed with the necessity for this type. What you DO want is the super-*Swift* — all oil — and don't fiddle about armour; it really is so VERY silly! There is only ONE defence and that is SPEED! for all small vessels (*except those* who go under water). The super-*Swift* is MAINLY wanted for the submarine. The submarine has no horizon. The *Swift* tells her where the enemy is and then flees for her life with 40 knots speed! The super-*Lion*, the super-*Swift* and the super-Submarine — *all else is wasted money!*

The luxuries of the present are the necessities of the future. Our grandfathers never had a bath-room . . . *You have got to plunge for three years ahead!* And THE ONE thing is to keep Foreign Admiralties running after you! It's Hell for *them*!

The Germans are going to have a motor battleship before us and a cruiser that will make the circuit of the world without having to replenish her fuel! *What an Alabama!*[2]

The most damnable person for you to have any dealings with is a Naval Expert! Sea fighting is pure common sense. The first of all its necessities is SPEED, so as to be able to fight —

When you like
Where you like
and *How* you like.

Therefore the super-*Lion*, the super-*Swift* and the super-Submarine are the only three types for fighting (*speed* being THE characteristic

[1] This letter was in reply to Churchill's letter of January 12th pertaining to the design of the new light cruisers. The question was: 'Should the new light cruiser be the smallest of the cruisers [improved *Blonde*] or the biggest of the destroyers [improved *Swift*]?' The *Active*, which is mentioned elsewhere, was of the 'Blonde' class. See Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 71, 137-42, for the January 12th letter, related background material, and the denouement. The *Dartmouth* was a light cruiser which had been laid down in 1910 and completed in 1911; the 'Frenzies' was the fanciful name given by Churchill to a class of projected light cruiser, 'super-*Swifts*'. Fisher's letter to Churchill of January 16th, also those of February 13th and 25th, are the versions that appear in *The World Crisis*, I, 139-40, 104-5, 106-7, respectively.

[2] The cruiser *Alabama*, most famous and successful of the Confederate commerce-raiders in the American Civil War.

of each of these types). AVIATION has wiped out the intermediate types. No armour for anything but the super-*Lion, and there restricted!* Cost, £1,995,000; speed, *over 30 knots*; all oil; 10 '*improved*' guns; and you'll make the Germans '*squirm*'!

You had better adopt 2 keels to 1! You have it now. It will be safe; it will be popular; it will head off the approaching German naval increase. Above all remember Keble in *The Christian Year.*[1] 'The dusky hues of glorious War'! There is always the risk of a bad Admiral before a second A. K. Wilson comes along to supersede him! How that picture of old '*ard* '*eart* (as the Sailors call him) rises before me now! . . . Three big Fleets that had never seen each other came from three different quarters to meet him off Cape St. Vincent — in sight of Trafalgar. When each was many hundreds of miles away from him, he ordered them by 'wireless' exactly what to do, and that huge phalanx met together at his prescribed second of time without a signal or a sound and steamed a solid mass at 14 knots and dropped their anchors with one splash! Are we going to look at his like again? So you had better have 2 keels to 1! 'The dusky hues of glorious War.' What a hymn for *The Christian Year* by a Saint like Keble!

348: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

Naples
January 23rd, 1912

Dear Mrs. Meynell,

I can't find any remembrances of Nelson here. I've read the local guide books closely and smelt all the smells of Naples on your behalf to give you something for your book, which I love to hear of.[2]

I hope you will have a good word for that much maligned heroine, Lady Hamilton, without whom Nelson would not have been what he was! It was *true* what he said: '*If there were more Emmas, there would be more Nelsons.*' And he only had one Emma all his life! The Duke of Wellington had 39 (I remember the number because it's the same as the Articles of Religion!), and George Washington, so a great American told me recently, *reeked* with Emmas! He had proofs of it. Why is Nelson blazoned (like David) for one indiscretion, or rather

[1] The extraordinarily successful and beautiful book of hymns (1827) by John Keble, English clergyman, poet, and leader of the Oxford Movement.

[2] Mrs. Meynell was completing a little book, *The Story of Lady Hamilton*, which was published in April 1912. She had, in 1906, written a larger work, *Nelson's Lady Hamilton.*

one idolatry of one woman's enthusiasm, and Napoleon, George Washington, Wellington all considered Saints! Is it because

'In Angels faults conspicuous grow
The smallest speck is seen in snow'?

And then another ass writes and says Nelson was egotistical! *Why, how could he help it?* He felt like Gideon when he went to battle!

'*The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.*'

Do you think anyone but a second Gideon could have written that prayer the morning he was slain?[1] *Forty thousand Archbishops of Canterbury couldn't write a prayer like that!* Have no fear, Nelson will be found inside the Pearly Gates, when lots of us won't! I shan't! at least not till after a lot of Purgatory first!

But it is cruel how Nelson is forgotten! Fancy Lord Rosebery wasting himself on Pitt and Napoleon,[2] as compared with what his brilliant pen might have done for Nelson! I wrote to him about it — I will try and find what he replied and send it [to] you — but, nevertheless, in one's own small and humble experience what *really repays* is one's own consciousness of '*faith in the right*'!

'T'is *not* the grapes of Canaan that repay
But the proud Faith that fails not by the way.'

Yet again Gideon:

'*Faint yet pursuing*'!!!

I recall things, just fleeting at this moment through my brain, some of them trifles — base ingratitude, malignant calumnies, social ostracism. What have they all signified?

Yours always,

Fisher

[1] This is Nelson's beautiful prayer, written in his diary on the morning of Trafalgar: 'May the Great God, whom I worship, grant to my Country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious Victory; and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it; and may humanity after Victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet. For myself, individually, I commit my life to Him who made me, and may His blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my Country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen. Amen. Amen.'

[2] The Earl of Rosebery had written *Napoleon: the Last Phase* (1900) and *Chatham: His Early Life and Connections* (1910).

349: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

Naples
February 7th, 1912

Dear Mrs. Meynell,

Your delightful present arrived last night and I have given it a first reading — a second reading to-morrow, and it deserves a third! It augurs well for your coming book. 'You naught extenuate', but you set nothing down in malice! I like page 14: 'Far less shame to her confiding warm heart than to the unscrupulous men who misled her.' My grandfather lived at 149 New Bond Street, and Emma cleaned the doorsteps next door (now Groves, the fishmonger), and he told me of her beauty and at that time total unconsciousness of it. We forget the standard of morals at that time. No one objects to Abraham and Hagar (his Lady Hamilton) or Jacob and Bilhah and Zilpah! and what chance had Lady Hamilton! Then the other side — Nelson's temperament yearned for enthusiasm and emotion and passion and a child. He didn't find them in the widow Nesbit, and a damnable drunken, ungrateful stepson thrown in and always thrown at him! Robertson of Brighton, the greatest preacher of the world after Buddha, understood this, but I spare you a sermon!

Nelson has never yet been rightly understood and portrayed, and there are depths even you have not sounded in this superlatively excellent little book on Lady Hamilton. A man's vices are the shadows of his virtues, so also in a woman, only less understood. We are so cold-blooded with our heroes and heroines! I am always so thankful that the Bible explicitly states that David was a man after God's own heart! Angels don't live on earth — '*humanum est errare*'. The qualities of a great Sinner are those of a great Saint. A cabbage couldn't win the Battle of Trafalgar.

Yours always,

Fisher

350: TO GERARD FIENNES

Naples
February 8th, 1912

Private

My dear Fiennes,

. . . What you say about Winston Churchill is right. He has the courage to produce Armageddon. His association with Burgoyne is all to the good, and if he sent for Hurd, that is good also, and if you

lunch with him it will be better. St. Paul made an excellent remark. He said so long as the Gospel was preached he didn't care a d—n who did it, whether Paul or Apollo or Cephas!

I am in continuous and very close correspondence with Winston, so I am precluded from saying all that I desire, but so far every step he contemplates is good, *and he is brave, which is everything! Napoleonic in audacity, Cromwellian in thoroughness.* He can't go quite so far as I urge him, as his instruments are inadequate. They shiver on the brink and won't take the great plunge. He can't well plunge alone. I would. The *Dreadnought* was a plunge. So was the water-tube boiler! putting the fire where the water was, and the water where the fire used to be! And Sir William Allan, M.P., amidst the cheers of the House of Commons, calling me a murderer — 'boiling the stokers alive'![1] The turbine was a plunge. The *Lion* was a plunge, with an untried gun, the 13½-inch, and nearly 36 shore miles of speed! '*Plunge is progress!*' Foreign Admiralties pause, while the British Navy, like John Brown's soul, goes marching on! and splendid patriots like Sir William White, Custance, Sir Gerard Noel, and others, make Foreign Admiralties pause still more with arguments for small battleships and vilifications of a retrograde British Admiralty. So we get a start, dear friend! a *d—d big start!* and a stern chase is a long chase! and so the Germans hustle and lay down their first 4 Dreadnoughts in a hell of a hurry, and they all draw two feet too much water and even the Turks wouldn't buy them! I plunged on the submarine when I was First Sea Lord. EVERY SOUL AGAINST ME! I called the cab! So got them! I was told by Beresford & Co. they were 'playthings', and the Treasury said I was chucking millions into the sea. 'Sheer d—d obstinacy!' And they have made our supremacy more supreme than ever, and caused America to want us.

That's a wonderful story! the influence of our submarine policy on the United States! No German expedition can go to Brazil, and Mexico is safe against Japan! Our new submarines with over 6,000 miles radius of action, two 12-pdrs., and Whitehead torpedoes on the broadside, and seakeeping for over two months, unattended and unfuelled and self-sustaining, have woken up vast dormant possibilities. Mahan is an extinct volcano. So the motto is '*Plunge!*' *It is vital.*

Imagine the hysterics if there is a German motor battleship and a German cruiser going round the world without replenishing her fuel! and England not in front! *Oil and internal combustion propulsion*

[1] See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 100.

will sweep the ocean! I told the Americans this at New York on November 26, 1910. A millionaire friend of mine took my advice and he has scrapped his whole fleet of 'tramps' and is building motor boats.

Yours always, Fisher

351: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Naples
February 13th, 1912

I can't support you at all in any way whatever for any two years' or more programme. Some d—d fool has got hold of you to have made you say that! THE GREAT SECRET IS TO PUT OFF TO THE VERY LAST HOUR THE SHIP (big or little) that you mean to build (or PERHAPS NOT BUILD HER AT ALL!). You see all your rivals' plans fully developed, their vessels started beyond recall, and then in each individual answer to each such rival vessel you plunge with a design 50 per cent better! knowing that your rapid shipbuilding and command of money will enable you to have your vessel fit to fight as soon if not sooner than the rival vessel. Sometimes, as in one famous year, you can drop an armoured ship and put the money into acceleration of those building because you have a new design coming along, so don't be a d—d ass and deliberately lay down a ship which you know is obsolete by some sudden vast step in old Watts' brain! '*Sufficient for the year is the programme thereof.*' For God's sake, get that written up somewhere for you to look at when you get out of bed in the morning! and do please tell me the name of the born fool who hoaxed you. Is it — ? He has just got a gold medal in America for advocating smaller battleships, I believe . . . You know Archbishop Whately proved that Napoleon Bonaparte never existed! . . .

We are asses now for not building a 16-inch gun, as Sir E. Wilmot[1] told you in the letter I sent you — but YOU can't help yourself any more than you can help deliberately laying down ships for the Line of Battle that go less than 30 knots — there are certain things, my beloved Winston, that even God Almighty can't help! (let alone you!) He, for instance, can't help two added to two being four! . . .

The most damnable thing in the world is a servile copyist! One of the four Nelsonic attributes is '*Power of Initiative*'! and '*Plunge*' is the watchword of '*Progress*'! but I sicken you with my reiteration, so good-bye.

[1] Rear-Admiral (ret.) Sir Sydney Eardley-Wilmot, a gunnery and torpedo expert.

352: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Naples
February 25th, 1912

I hasten to reply to your letter of February 19th[1] just arrived, because if your programme (which has my enthusiastic admiration) *is not embodied in an Act of Parliament*, then all my objections vanish! An Act of Parliament (The Naval Defence Act) [1889] *made* us build 20 cruisers that had only 48 hours coal supply. *Can I ever forget that?* but Providence came along and made them useful as 'mine-layers'. However, ocean 'tramps' at £10 a ton would have been cheaper and more effective. Sir W. White built the 'County' Class and forgot the guns, but Providence came along and has made them useful for commerce protectors with their 6-inch guns and big coal supply and good speed. However, a few 'Mauretanias' would be far more effective than a hundred 'Countys'![2]

I can only pray that your programme will be officially published — for *it is sure to leak out!* It will add immensely to your reputation and influence and the moral effect will be prodigious!

The *keynote* is 2 keels to 1 for all increases above the present German Law! *2 to 1 in armoured cruisers is also vital!*

You don't say a word of your visit to Jellicoe — *but he does!* He is '*much impressed with your grasp of the whole business*', and, as Jellicoe very seldom indeed gives praise, I think you must have talked well! as well as that night we stumbled over the dockyard stores at Devonport, returning from the *Lion* and the *Monarch*! (It's a pity we didn't have a shorthand writer!)

Don't make any mistake about big submarines being obligatory! . . .

Big risks bring big success! (It was Napoleon, wasn't it? '*Risk nothing, get nothing!*') Increased surface speed is *above all* a necessity, and broadside torpedo discharges and the bigger gun will come automatically with the above two essentials, and they (*the big submarines*) will be destroyers, with all the advantages of the present destroyers and — as well — the power of submergence during daylight attacks. Battle tactics will be revolutionized and England's power will be multiplied not sevenfold but manifold! and with a radius of action of 6,000 miles . . . but it wants an Isaiah to proclaim this vision!

[1] Churchill's letter of February 19th, which was in reply to Fisher's letter of February 13th, is in his *The World Crisis*, I, 105-6.

[2] But Churchill afterwards commented: 'A doubtful gem! They could have coaled only in a few ports with special appliances' (*ibid.*, I, 106).

For God's sake, trample on and stamp out protected cruisers and hurry up aviation[1]. . . .

353: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Naples
March 2nd, 1912

Dear Angel,

. . . *Secret.* I was invited to meet Bonar Law at a small private country-house party, including F. E. Smith, ten days ago, but I declined. I'm sure it's best my keeping away . . . I am not idle here. I am making notes.

> 'There's a chiel amang ye takin' notes,
> And faith! he'll prent 'em.'

I really believe you'd be the best editor for me to leave them to! Would you be sufficiently indiscreet? I know you would be brave enough! *You are a brave woman — I know it!* I've put that down in my memoirs — you never faltered when your Reggie's political life was at stake!

I know I can trust you not to repeat what I am going to say, but I *know* there is much *fresh hope* in the Opposition. The Prime Minister is *so adroit* that I hope their very confident anticipations won't be realized! I simply say this as a patriot. Imagine being ruled by the d—d fools who turned out Balfour! What WOULD sweep the Government out of office INSTANTLY would be any more *Heligolands*!!! There would be a frenzy — a GUST of fury and passion uncontrollable to cancel any such blackmail! *Napoleon B. has wrecked everyone and everything he ever touched!* If Beresford only knew it, Napoleon B. really put him on the beach by his underhand support, which led Beresford on. He'll wreck Grey AND HE'LL WRECK THE GOVERNMENT! 'H. M. G.!' (Better get up another Halsbury Club!!!)[2]

[1] 'For a specimen of Fisher's genius I commend these last few lines. Ten years of submarine development, spurred on by war on the greatest scale, were required to overtake in exact sequence the processes of that amazing vision in technical affairs. The consequences to Great Britain were, however, not so satisfactory as he forecasted' (*loc. cit.*).

[2] 'H.M.G.', the 'H' standing for Haldane, was Fisher's adaptation of Maxse's 'B.M.G.' slogan of the autumn of 1911 (first used in the *National Review* of September), which stood for: 'Balfour Must Go.' This became the war cry of the 'die-hards' in the Conservative Party, who rejected the advice of the Party leader, Balfour, and favoured fighting the Parliament Bill to the last ditch. The organization of the die-hards in the Halsbury Club in October, headed by their leader, the Earl of Halsbury, was the last straw for Balfour and led to his resignation as Party leader in November.

I had dining with me here a fortnight ago the greatest shipowner in Germany, a multi-millionaire. He opened my eyes to the deep-seated, far-spread hatred in Germany — a Heligoland would only be giving blood to the tiger! *Time the Healer*, he said, the only present recipe, and Grey was right when he said, '*Don't go on tapping the barometer*'. I think it was a humiliating spectacle for a British Cabinet Minister to be crawling up the back stairs of the German Foreign Office in carpet slippers![1] (*What a cartoon for F. C. Gould!*)[2] And yet, like the d—d fools we are, we don't see what all these foreigners see! And what THREE VERY GREAT FOREIGNERS have recently said — 'that never in the history of the world has any Empire been so supremely predominant as the British Empire at this moment'! And *what was the proof?* 'That the British Empire floats on the British Navy, and the British Navy is more powerful than all the navies of the world put together.' These three men don't know each other, and all said the same thing. A German, an American, and a Frenchman: the biggest German shipowner, the most influential American Ambassador, and the greatest Foreign Minister that France ever had and a member of the French Academy! No! As I've told you before, we are the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel and it don't matter a tinker's d—n how many Napoleon B.'s we have!

'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star,
In high cabal have made us what we are.'

My fondest love to you both for ever.
Yours affectionately,

Fisher

I am so delighted that Hankey is made Secretary of the C. I. D. He is *Napoleonic* and *Cromwellian! I've no doubt whatever that Reggie urged his suit!*[3]

[1] 'Any more Heligolands would mean certain war. It's very peculiar how we have left our impregnable position we occupied before Haldane's visit, to take up a most humiliating, weak, and dangerous one' (Fisher to Esher, March 7th, 1912). Lord Haldane had been sent to Berlin (the 'Haldane Mission', February 8th-10th) to try to reach a naval understanding with Germany. The mission was fruitless, as the Germans would make no naval concessions without a political agreement – a British promise of neutrality in certain circumstances.

[2] Sir Francis Gould, the noted political writer and cartoonist, with the *Westminster Gazette*, 1893-1914 (as Assistant Editor from 1896), and Editor of his own paper, *Picture Politics*, 1894-1914.

[3] '. . . I have no doubt at all that your wonderful generalship achieved the result so inestimably advantageous to the C.I.D.' (Fisher to Esher, March 7th, 1912). '. . . I got him appointed in Ottley's place and I must see him through' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, March 9th, 1912).

354: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Naples
March 5th, 1912

Dear Winston,

. . . About the very best *national* and *thoroughly reasonable* public and patriotic act ever performed was your speech at Glasgow.[1] There is absolutely no flattery in this and I have no reason to flatter you. I was so impressed by the value of that Glasgow speech that I have taken the trouble to get hold of every d—d thing said about it at home AND ABROAD. *Per contra* I also endeavoured to elicit the effect amongst the crowd in Germany of Haldane's visit. For you will see it is a case of creditor and debtor as to what the two acts have done. You may say it don't matter a d—d what the German masses think in view of the way Germany is governed and who decides peace and war in that conscript-ridden country, and if Haldane's visit has captured the clique that lent itself to Monsieur Caillaux's dirty tricks and treachery to England,[2] then all is well. I humbly tell you all is not well and the effect of Haldane's visit is absolutely the opposite of the effect of your speech at Glasgow, *and a most damnable effect!* inasmuch as it has INCREASED and not LESSENED the war fever in Germany, for undoubtedly the 'οἱ πολλοί' [*hoi polloi*] think we are afraid, whereas your Glasgow speech was as straight as a die. It said, '*We'll fight to the finish and mean to win — make no d—d mistake, dear friends*'. I got a very important letter only yesterday — a German Admiral of very high repute uses these words: 'Public opinion has been roused in Germany in a way I had not thought possible'! A gust of German passion would carry the German ruling clique off its legs and a gust of British passion would sweep the Government out of existence, *which God forbid!* (Imagine being ruled by the d—d *fools* who got rid of Balfour and propose Walter Long as First Lord of the Admiralty!) *No more Heligolands! There would be a British frenzy!* and the Germans would taste blood and want

[1] Churchill's speech at Glasgow, February 9th, stated Britain's resolve to maintain her naval supremacy – there was no need for alarm or panic, the Admiralty having the situation well in hand – that the Navy was a necessity for Britain but a 'luxury' to Germany (which infuriated the Germans), that Britain 'would welcome any retardation or slackening of naval rivalry. We should meet any such slackening, not by words but by deeds . . . [But] As naval competition becomes more acute we shall have, not only to increase the number of the ships we build, but the ratio which our naval strength will have to bear to other great naval Powers, so that our margin of superiority will become larger, and not smaller, as the strain grows greater'.

[2] Joseph Caillaux, French Prime Minister, 1911-1912, who was thought by many Englishmen and Frenchmen to have been too submissive to Germany during the Agadir Crisis. The outcry of the French nationalists caused his fall in January 1912.

more! As Clemenceau[1] says, 'Five times has France been on her knees'! She'll be there again! The Congo hasn't satisfied the German appetite well! The whole point of all I've written so far is to urge that in your presentation of the Estimates you *clearly* and *distinctly* indicate that there will be no German increase. *Your letter plainly infers you will not do this but wait till the new German law has been introduced.* It will be too late then. They can't go back then. You want to influence the German masses, who are pushing so vehemently now. They think an English Cabinet Minister has been crawling up the back stairs of the German Foreign Office in carpet slippers! *Show them an English Cabinet Minister with a mailed fist.*

Don't imagine I'm warlike. Why, I did away with the House of Lords! *Ask* Lloyd George, he'll tell you! *He knows the secret!* and ask Norman Angell. See what he says in his book, that I am not an Inigo![2] *But I know that Cromwell was right!* Cromwell was a pious man. He said, 'The Fear of the Lord — and a broomstick!' but it was *the broomstick* THAT DID THE BUSINESS! So I do earnestly pray that the Government will not allow the Navy trumpet to give an uncertain sound, and the German then will not prepare himself for the battle.

I fear I can't agree with you in the substitution of 8 'Super-Actives' for 'Swifts'. *It's money chucked away!* The 'Super-Swift' has a mission that a 'Super-Active' cannot fulfil. You might as well ask a cabbage to be a violet! The 'Super-Actives', with only their 30 knots and small size, which will instantly cause their speed to lessen in any sea whatever, will be all gobbled up by an armoured cruiser, like the armadillo gobbles up the ants — puts out its tongue and licks them up one after another — and the bigger the ant, the more placid the digestive smile! You are making an awful mistake. Your first impulse of the 'Super-Swift' was Heaven-born! *B.M.G.* [Briggs must go.] *Aviation* is the 'Super-Active'! Of all the damnable follies ever perpetrated, nothing compares with the small cruiser! ARMOUR IS VISION!!! The 'Super-Active' can't push home a recon-

[1] Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister, 1906-1909, 1917-1920.

[2] Norman (afterwards Sir Norman) Angell's book, *The Great Illusion* (1910), was a classic blast against armament races. As regards the reference to 'Inigo', in 1617 Ben Jonson told the Prince of Wales that when he wanted words to express the greatest villain in the world, he would call him an 'Inigo'. This was after Inigo Jones, the architect, who designed stage sets for court masques written by Jonson. On June 19th, 1911, Fisher had written to Gerard Fiennes: 'I am assimilating just now the heavenly manna of *The Great Illusion*! Recommended to me. "So man did eat angels' food", as David says in the 78th Psalm! "It's very well worked out and will have a big circulation, I think. He blackmails me gently!' The book was subsequently translated into twenty-two languages and sold two million copies.

naissance. They must flee for their lives — but they can't escape with 30 knots. The 'Super-Swift' with 40 knots *can*, but her mission is to back up the submarine, not do what aviation can do better — but no use saying any more. You can't help yourself, and I am not First Sea Lord to call the cab!

As to vote 9 [naval armaments], you can overdo reserves. Not many rounds will be fired at Armageddon! A shore-going battle is different. You want millions of cartridges there to keep up their spirits. I forget how many millions for one wound — it was worked out for Colenso. (I'm going through your letter, line by line.)

The 20 destroyers *splendid* — all oil, I hope! and I hope *super-heating and Yarrow* are in it (*see Yarrow, I beg you*). The 100 Warrant Officers also magnificent[1] — but alas! you do not mention the paltry sum about a couple of hundred thousand pounds wanted to open the Navy to all classes. Our officers are restricted now to less than 1/40th of the population. *We want the brains of the other 39/40ths!*

Your new scheme of Fleet organization is admirable.[2] What on earth is the use of our risking our existence for France if we get no return. Let the French take care of the Mediterranean, and a hot time they'll have of it with submarines poking about in that lake! We are well out of it. Move Malta to Alexandria at once — now that the Italian War is still on. Alexandria is the Key of Islam, and Islam is the Key of the British Empire. That passage made into Alexandria Harbour without a soul in the world or the *Daily Mail* ever getting hold of it even to this day will hereafter be a striking thing in my memoirs, which I am busy at. It will make a lot of people sit up if my editor is only indiscreet enough. It must be a woman — no man

[1] 'These are the days', Churchill had declared in the House of Commons on March 18th, 'when the Navy, which is the great national service, should be opened more broadly to the nation as a whole.' With this in view, and to relieve the shortage of commissioned officers, he announced that the Admiralty would each year select 25 to 30 of the younger warrant officers, up to a total of 100, 'possibly more', for promotion to the rank of commissioned warrant officer (an existing rank equivalent to that of sub-lieutenant). They would be available for all executive duties of sub-lieutenants and would be eligible for promotion to the higher ranks. The details of the lower-deck promotion scheme were announced in August 1912, and the system was extended to the Royal Marines in March 1913.

[2] In a circular letter dated March 29th (though outlined on March 18th in Parliament by Churchill), the Admiralty announced a reorganization of the various fleets and squadrons, effective May 1st. The principal change was the formation of a naval command known as the Home Fleets (with Callaghan as Commander-in-Chief), consisting of a First Fleet (fully manned ships), Second Fleet (nucleus crew ships), and a Third Fleet (reduced nucleus crew ships). The four battle squadrons of the First Fleet consisted of the newest and most powerful battleships and cruisers. The first two squadrons were composed of ships already in home waters; the Atlantic Fleet (based on Gibraltar until now) became the 3rd Battle Squadron; and the 4th Battle Squadron, to be stationed at Gibraltar, was formed of battleships withdrawn from the Mediterranean Fleet (Malta).

brave enough. I think I have got her, an American! But this is a digression! . . .

B. M. G. Well! I know you are looking after the shop all right. Heaven bless you.

Yours always, Fisher

I want you to understand that I don't go away from my Big Principles!

I. *ALL* armoured ships to be *OVER 30*-knot speed.

II. Big submarines with broadside torpedo discharges and higher surface speed, and this automatically will carry with it a 4-inch gun, and the United States will love us.

III. 'Super-Swifts' and no d—d silly things that can't fight or run away.

IV. AVIATION *in excelsis.*

V. State-paid education of Naval Officers.

VI. Our Bluejackets and Marines to have far increased opportunities of becoming officers *and to be better treated all round.* (They are the pick of the nation.) *Nelson won his victories by his men.* THAT was the NELSON TOUCH.

P.S. A woman reserves herself for the postscript. She is right — it's the last word! What I am now going to say to you is far more important than the German Menace or the Coal Strike or Plural Voting! If you don't give your *personal* attention to it, we shall find ourselves in the background when Armageddon comes along. I have been fighting this matter since October 21, 1904, the day I became First Sea Lord. Every Admiral and Captain and almost all others are against me, but so far there has been Splendid Victory. The year before the New Gunnery was started in the Navy in 1904 there were TWO THOUSAND more *misses* than *hits* — in the very next year there were exactly 2,000 more hits than misses, and the edifice was crowned by the Dreadnought-Cruiser *Indomitable*, steaming 20 knots, which hit a target 1/14 her own size being towed on an unknown course at 12 knots at a distance of 5 miles, *18 times out of 20!* with her 12-inch guns! Jellicoe has also fought this battle for 8 years. It is desired to abolish the Gunlayers' Test — or, as a d—d compromise *equally fatal*, to make it biennial. The real whole sole reason is the dislike of being '*shown up*' by competition and the desire on all sides to live under conditions of less high pressure than at present. As sure as we relax the strain we are ruined, and Armageddon will find us in the back-

ground. We have a Psalm-singing fool as Inspector of Target Practice[1] and a very timid Director of Naval Ordnance, and the First and Second Sea Lords have not been suckled on gunnery and don't and can't know the innermost pith and marrow of HITTING *first*!

My counsel is, send [for] Jellicoe about something else and engage him in private talk — he is fearfully sensitive as regards loyalty to the First Sea Lord. So you will have to draw him carefully, but I counsel this because I want you to assure yourself by the testimony of the best officer the Navy has ever had since Nelson that I am correct in warning you of the vital danger hovering around. You must make Admiral Peirse Controller, whether you like him or not, and put the present Captain of the *Excellent* as Director of Naval Ordnance, and someone like Captain Phillpotts or Mark Kerr as Inspector of Target Practice.[2] That's what I would do. You MUST be Ruthless, Relentless, and Remorseless in administration, if you want in battle TO HIT FIRST, *hit hard*, and *keep on hitting* —

The 3 R's and the 3 H's
AND the 3 L's!!![3]

The gunnery of the Fleet is not in a satisfactory position at present. Many of those in authority hold very dangerous opinions. That bit of wood painted to look like iron who is Commander-in-Chief at Devonport [May] is perhaps the chief, and other fossils like Sir A. Moore; and dear old Bridgeman is like Gallio,[4] he drives them from the Judgement Seat, and Battenberg is too much a bureaucrat. But *I tell you the matter is vital.* If the Gunlayers' Test is altered one little bit, it will be fatal to efficiency.

But that is not enough — *you want a clean sweep.* Controller, D. N. O., and Inspector of Target Practice — it's a *Tria juncta in uno!*[5] The papers on the subject are circulating now at the Admiralty.

[1] Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Montague E. Browning, Inspector of Target Practice, 1911-1913.

[2] Rear-Admiral A. G. H. W. Moore, as noted above, succeeded Briggs, not Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Richard H. Peirse. Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Frederick C. T. Tudor, Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Excellent* (the Gunnery School, Portsmouth), did succeed Moore as D.N.O. in June 1912 (-1914). In August 1913, on the termination of Browning's appointment, the post of Inspector of Target Practice was abolished and its duties transferred to the Naval Ordnance Department and to the staffs of commanders-in-chief afloat.

[3] The '3 L's' is a puzzler. Perhaps 'Look, Listen, and Leap'!

[4] Gallio, the easy-going deputy or proconsul of Achaia, a Roman province in Greece, ca. A.D. 51, dismissed the case against Paul and drove the Jewish prosecutors from the tribunal.

[5] '*Tria juncta in uno*', three joined in one, is the motto of the Order of Bath (referring to the three classes of which the order consists). It had often been used by Fisher in speaking of the Esher Committee of 1903-1904. He was not unmindful of the fact that Nelson and the Hamiltons had so referred to their unique relationship.

Get them — and ask Jellicoe's opinion and then put your foot down.

May I also ask your attention to the letter on the other side?[1] I get shoals of letters telling me how true it is. If only I were First Sea Lord, I would recommend for your approval a strong dose of Haman, only I'd hang them just a bit higher.

355: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Naples
March 13th, 1912

Dear Winston,

I've put pencil marks on enclosed paper from Jellicoe. Perhaps you don't know that Sir Isaac Newton (whom you may have heard of in connection with an apple — curious how apples have affected our destinies as well as our digestions! 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away,' and Treves said, 'An onion will keep every other man'. So a lovely woman said to him! There was also Eve, you know!). Well, Sir Isaac cut a hole in his study door for his favourite cat to come in, as she used to scratch at the door. When she had kittens, he said, 'I'm d—d if I am going to have the same bother with the children also'. So he cut a small hole also for the kittens. Jellicoe as clever as Newton, but everyone of us have moments of mental aberration, and his obliquity has taken the line of 'Super-Actives' instead of kittens! I am so surprised at YOUR being influenced by the crowd! It is [for] YOU to lead the crowd, not the *crowd* you! Not one single officer in the Navy agreed with me on October 21, 1904. But it didn't signify!

[1] Enclosed was an anonymous letter from *The Times* of March 2nd, 'an appeal to my brother officers in the higher ranks of the Navy' to assist in making a success of the Selborne Scheme. 'The young officers affected will shortly have to decide in which branch of the Service they intend to specialize. I have talked to many of them, and they have quite an open mind on the subject, but some, and amongst these some of the very best, say, "I should like to go in for engineering, but Admiral this has written to my father strongly recommending him not to allow me, or Captain that told me that he thought I should be a fool to do so", and so on *ad nauseam* . . . Whether we like it or whether we do not, we are committed to the new scheme for years to come, and I maintain that it is our duty to our country and to our Service to assist in carrying it out to the utmost of our ability.' Churchill revealed, in his reply of March 9th, that the letter had been written by Custance! The same letter defended the 'Super-Actives' with reasoned arguments; said that he was 'not touching education for the present; it requires to be considered as a whole, and I certainly do not exclude from the area of practical consideration any reasonable method of widening the basis from which the officer class is drawn'; promised to give his 'very closest personal attention' to the Fleet gunnery once the estimates had been introduced; and concluded: 'The more I hear from you the better I shall be pleased.'

'Magna veritas est et prevaluit!'
'Athanasius contra mundum!'
'Fiat justitia — ruat coelum!'
'Do right and d—n the odds!!!'

Anyhow, read my pencil notes on Jellicoe's paper. *Bovril!* The essence is there!

If when you introduce the Navy Estimates you don't announce 2 keels to 1 for every ship above the existing German Navy Law, then you will make the mistake of your life. Whether it is officially published or not by the German Admiralty don't matter a fig! YOU ARE PROCLAIMING THE BRITISH NAVY LAW! Aren't we allowed a Law! (What a chance to say 'Bonnie Law'!!!) *Never mind your colleagues! It's the British Empire at your back!*

Take out the electrical turrets from *Invincible* — money well spent. I am indeed glad to hear you will give your closest personal attention to the gunnery of the Fleet. *It's in a parlous state.* Send for Jellicoe and Percy Scott. The matter is more vital than the coal strike, women [women suffrage], or the plural voter! Even of more consequence, and associated with the gunnery, is the FACT that the *esprit* is oozing out of the Home Fleet. Too much Bayly![1]

The first day I was First Sea Lord they brought me two feet high of papers. I said, 'Take 'em away — I'm going to attend to the Fleet and not what a lot of d—d old women have written in these papers'. When I took a gigantic reform vitally affecting the Navy to a nameless First Sea Lord, he put it in his drawer and said he *must* FIRST get through the papers I then saw on his table! My paper was discovered in his drawer when he was dead! You and all your colleagues are like that First Sea Lord. You are doing your d—d papers instead of — well, who was it? Nero wasn't it? who fiddled! I don't mean to say you are going to have a mutiny at the Nore, but I do mean to say what I said to Mr. Balfour: 'The secret of successful administration is the intelligent anticipation of agitation.'

Yours always,

Fisher

Foreshadow in your speech on the Navy Estimates that the Officers of the Navy shall be open to all classes, and that our Sailors and Marines *must* and SHALL have their interests attended to, and

[1] Rear-Admiral Bayly commanded the 1st Cruiser Squadron of the Home Fleet, 1911-1912.

they must not be over-done. And then say '2 keels to 1'! *Ut veniant omnes.* 'Let 'em all come.'[1]

356: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
April 2nd, 1912

My beloved E.,

Your letter this moment come! This morning walking in the sun with the thermometer 70° in the shade, and looking at the sea, I decided to write to the Apostle of the 70,000 Islanders, and here comes your letter! Yes, the Islanders have done wonders, but I'm sorry you gave away the number in *The Times*! There was a lovely mystery which magnified them! '*Pas de culte sans mystère*'*!*

As you say, Winston has done splendidly. *I know you will keep it to yourself*: He and I last November discussed every brick of his speech in Devonport Dockyard while visiting the 33-knot *Lion*-Dreadnought by night alone together! and don't accuse me of too much egotism, but he stopped dramatically on the dockyard stones and said to me: '*You're a great man!*' He only rues one thing — that eventful night I urged him to get a new Controller and he funked. He now bitterly regrets it, and now every letter says '*B.M.G.*'!

We are lagging behind in out-Dreadnoughting the *Dreadnought*! A plunge, of course — a huge plunge — but so was the *Dreadnought* — so was the turbine — so was the water-tube boiler and, last of all, so was the 13½-inch gun, which now holds the field, and the whole Board of Admiralty (bar Jellicoe) and all the experts dead against it, *but we plunged!* So it is now — we want more speed — less armour — a 15-inch gun — more sub-division — oil only — and chauffeurs instead of engineers and stokers, and a Dreadnought that will go round the world without requiring to replenish her fuel! The *Non-Pareil* — Winston says he'll call her the *Fisher*! (Keep all this most private.)

Winston sent me out a King's Messenger with his Estimates, etc., a brave thing to do and showing a big mind — for reasons you don't require — and I just rejoice on his account on his unmitigated success. If the men who turned out Balfour and have selected Walter

[1] On March 18th, in introducing the estimates, Churchill made his famous speech announcing the ratio of British to German naval construction that was to be maintained: sixty per cent superiority in dreadnoughts over Germany, but a two-keels-to-one programme of dreadnoughts if the Germans added to their fleet law. On Fisher's first recommendation, see below, p. 450, n. 2.

Long as First Lord of the Admiralty now come into power, *God help us! No one else could!* But I am a firm believer in the adroitness of the Prime Minister and his astounding gift of lucidity of exposition.

My correspondence with McKenna remains as close and intimate as ever. He hates Winston justly, yet he encourages me to help him all I can. This tends to keep me away from England. *I owe more than I can say to McKenna.* I owe nearly as much to Winston for scrapping a dozen Admirals on December 5 last so as to get Jellicoe Second-in-Command of the Home Fleet. If war comes before 1914, then Jellicoe will be Nelson at the Battle of St. Vincent; if it comes in 1914, then he'll be Nelson at Trafalgar! But Winston scrapped these Admirals without fear. I know no other First Lord in history who would have done it.

Again I've had quite affectionate letters from Bridgeman, Battenberg, and Pakenham. Why should I come home and filch their credit? The moment I come home everyone would say I was running the Admiralty — *and I know Winston!* He would never leave me alone! *Private.* He wants me to go [on] a cruise with him in the Admiralty Yacht at Whitsuntide. I AM NOT GOING! All this is to explain to you why I keep abroad, as you ask me what are my future plans.

Your letter in *The Times* on the German book quite excellent. Bernstorff's book is even more popular in Germany: *The War between England and Germany*[1] — with the picture of the *Dreadnought* with all her guns trained for action! Every little petty German newspaper is dead-on for war with England! *That I can assure you of!* So anything would kindle a war! Hence the *pith and marrow* of Winston's speech lies in these words, which I recommend to you as a text for a letter or an article:

> 'We MUST always be ready to meet at *our average moment* anything that any possible enemy might hurl against us at *his selected moment.*'

The banner unfurled on October 21st, 1904, by the d—d scoundrel who on that day became First Sea Lord had inscribed on it:

'*The fighting efficiency of the Fleet*'
and
'Its instant readiness for war'

[1] Fisher undoubtedly was referring to General Friedrich von Bernhardi's *Germany and the Next War* (English translation, London, 1912), which spoke of the inevitability of war between England and Germany, since England stood in the way of German expansion, and stated that the main task of Germany would be the defeat of the British Navy. The book caused quite a stir in England. Bernhardi was a retired general and an influential writer on military questions.

and, as Winston bravely said, that is now the case and no credit to himself, but he ought to have gone further back than McKenna for the credit. *It was Balfour!* He saw me through — no one else would allow 160 ships to be scrapped, etc., etc., etc. But you've had enough!

Hankey is better than Ottley. *He is Napoleonic!* I will write to Winston as you wish about the K. C. M. G.[1] . . . .

You mention Beresford. He is played out at home, *but he does great mischief abroad*, and, as you know, he is believed in at Buckingham Palace, and the King asked for him to be made an Admiral of the Fleet!

Wait till my memoirs are published by the unscrupulous American woman to whom I am leaving them to be printed in the United States! I hope you'll live to see how they will make '*big people sit up*' and the sawdust running out of many present reputations!

Quite by accident the other day I took up an American newspaper in this hotel! (we revel here in Americans!) and I read a most lucid and logical compression of Winston's speech on the Navy Estimates, with this remark in conclusion that not a brick of the splendid edifice reared in his speech but had been baked 6 to 8 years ago! Not in one English newspaper or by any parliamentarian was that credit given! Truly the Scripture says, 'A prophet is not without honour save in his own country'! But better still is the great Lord Bacon's will, which (thanks to Garvin) I know by heart:

> 'My name and memory I leave to Foreign Nations — and to my countrymen after some time be passed over.'

(Bayle's *Dictionary*, A.D. 1735, Vol. II, page 574.)

Yours always,

F.

[1] Esher wanted to procure a knighthood for Hankey to increase his stature in the C.I.D. As he wrote Fisher (April 11th), 'Hankey will do very well. He must wear a tall hat and a black coat! If he were ten years older, he might disregard these things! That is why I want a K.C.M.G. for him'. And again, on April 20th: 'I agree Hankey is first class, but I am not yet sure that he will carry the necessary weight. You know how personality counts in this world. He doesn't *look* Napoleonic.' But Hankey received merely the C.B. in 1912 and was not knighted until 1916 (K.C.B.).

357: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Naples
April 4th, 1912

Dearest Cis,

. . . Old Garvin is rather good in his *Observer* leading article you sent me. It's quite true what he says about your father! I fought for the autonomous Colonial Navies, and only old Kelvin supported me in the Dreadnought-Cruiser type, *which are going to sweep the world!* And I forced Winston Churchill, as the price of my advice, to go in for promoting Bluejackets to Lieutenants, and so he did the hundred in the Estimates! I suppose the truth will all come out some day.

Secret. PRIVATE. I got a letter two days ago to say the King was very 'wrathy' with me! I suppose for getting W. C. to do all he did last December 5! But the King ought to be satisfied now, as he has got W. C. to put in Hedworth Lambton and Berkeley Milne into places they ought never to have had, and which McKenna would not agree to when asked by the King.[1]

Your loving father,

F.

358: TO MRS. CECIL FISHER

Naples
April 4th, 1912

My sweet Jane,

. . . I heard from the Storeys at Boston that they are in great fear of a coal strike throughout the whole of the United States, and we have had a telegram here this morning to say that every coal mine has ceased working and one million miners have struck! I am not at all surprised, and my sympathy is entirely with the miners. I know for a positive fact that Lord Joicey made a million sterling profit in two years out of the coal mines he bought from Lord Durham for a million! which shows how the coal owners sweat both the miners and the poor Public as well! It's the same in almost every big industry! You pay your butcher probably exactly double what Cecil would sell you his lamb for off the farm! . . .

[1] Milne succeeded Poë as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet in June 1912 (-1914), and Lambton (now Admiral Sir Hedworth Meux), then on half-pay, succeeded Sir Arthur Moore as Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth in July 1912 (-1916). '. . . Lambton's appointment to Portsmouth was a gross breach of faith to Admiral Poë, who was entitled to it, let alone Egerton being promised the first high appointment! And Milne's appointment equally unjustifiable in deliberately cancelling the work of last December in putting a senior man afloat to Jellicoe. They are preparing for disaster!' (Fisher to Fiennes, late April 1912).

Everything is going perfectly splendid at the Admiralty. Lord Esher wrote to me yesterday that I was getting all my own way as completely as if I were at home. I've answered him, 'MUCH BETTER'! as no one knows and there's no envy! But keep all this to yourself.

My fond love to you both.

Your loving father,

F.

359: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Naples

April 20th, 1912

I think I may address you quite seriously as '*My Beloved Pamela*'! without your dear Reggie wanting to fight a duel! (Some day I must tell you the lovely story of a most beautiful woman in high circles in London, who told me her husband had been sitting on the doorstep waiting to shoot one of her man friends! *It wasn't me!* I told her I wished it was!) I have got your picture and love it, and it will always accompany me. *I don't think either of you quite fully know what my heart has in it for both of you!* But you'll see it and so will the world in my *Reflections*. (Don't you think that's rather a good title?) I don't think it will do for you to edit. There's too much about both of you![1] And secondly, it must be an unscrupulous American woman to publish it in New York. She is coming over to see me. Her father is an astute lawyer. One lovely chapter is headed, '*D—d Fools*'! Don't you think that's rather nice? It mostly deals with compulsory service and the military idiots who wanted to send 150,000 British soldiers to the Vosges frontier last autumn and summer! '*Gas-Bags*' is another heading! 'We asked for six, and you gave us eight' — and so on and so on.

Well, my dear Angel, and now for some secrets. A fortnight ago I got a reliable letter to say the King was very 'wrathy' with me! I couldn't make out this sudden outburst, and I'm not sure I make it out now! I saw two visits of W.C. chronicled, and one of the dear old 'sheep farmer' (as they call him) [Briggs], and one of Battenberg, and having had uninterrupted interchange of views with all three, there was a sudden stoppage — like daylight stops wireless! My last communication having been unmistakably damnable to all three as regards who should be Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, etc., etc., and then I saw the appointment of Sir

[1] Actually, for reasons not clear to the writer, there are no references to Pamela McKenna in *Memories* and *Records*, and only a few to McKenna.

Hedworth Pussy [Meux] and Sir Berkeley Mean [Milne] (he buys his *Times* second-hand for one penny!), and when he gave Lady Fisher a present on an auspicious occasion, he said he'd got a dozen cheap! I don't know who got the other eleven! (Don't you think that will be lovely in *Reflections*?) I suppose Winston 'stood out' at the first visit and succumbed in the second! But why the other two did not 'call the cab' is beyond my imagination! 'Pussy' will now be the next First Sea Lord, and Sir B. Mean is practically Admiralissimo, as he is the senior afloat! *Such is life!* Well, you'd better burn this at once, or Reggie will be leaving it on the Front Bench inadvertently when cooking his Welsh Rare-bit [Lloyd George]! But I may be all wrong in what I've written. So say not a word, please! I just am thinking aloud when writing to you! . . .

A Pharaoh has arisen who knows not Joseph. It is not worth while making it hot for Pharaoh. It's more dignified to be absolutely silent, and total abstention avoids opportunities for slights. Yes, 'the sceptre has departed from Judah', but Jowett of Balliol said, 'Don't explain, don't quarrel, don't worry'. . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

360: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

Naples
April 20th, 1912

Dear E. H. M.!

Being the initials of the writer of that incomparable little book, *The Story of Lady Hamilton*, which is just perfection in describing her as a most human creature of Elizabethan type and whose great merit was her warm heart! The warmth made it eloquent, and that eloquent heart captured Nelson's devotion because Pascal was right in his great saying of all sayings, 'Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.' She poured herself out unrestrainedly! and such emotion moves the world and removes mountains.

I have just been in Lady Hamilton's beautiful boudoir in the Palazzo Sessa[1] and came back and read your little book once more right through, and hence this letter! I imagined Nelson walking on its balcony, looking out on the lovely view of this splendid bay and his Fleet just below him. The sea in those days washed up to the

[1] The Palazzo Sessa was the British Embassy in Naples at that time.

narrow steep hill leading up to this Palazzo of Cardinal Sessa, and Nelson must have revelled in the magnificence of the scene,

'Where every prospect pleases
And only man is vile.'[1]

The balcony he walked on is like the stern walk of an old battleship and curves round the oval end of the room, one end of it looking straight on Vesuvius and the other on the lovely slopes of Posilipo and Capri in the distance in front, which, though as far off as Calais from Dover, has all its houses even distinguishable to the naked eye because of the wonderful clearness of the atmosphere! Right beneath the balcony is the anchorage of Santa Lucia. Six marble columns are the sides of the 3 large windows opening out to the balcony, and the oval painted ceiling is there just as Nelson looked on it, and also the beautiful old doors with their lovely gilding, but the mirrors which framed the whole sides of the room have gone, but one could imagine her, as Goethe saw her, practising before these mirrors her famous 'attitudes'[2] and displaying her dissolving shapes of beauty to the delighted gaze of her admirers! and even the cold Sir Gilbert Elliot[3] saying how they announce her very refined taste! I kept silent a long time in that room. Without doubt she reacted on Nelson and made him greater, but that requires an essay to explain! And what a crowning glory that he died in the moment of victory (as the little Midshipman wrote in the log book, '4.30 p.m. A victory having been reported to the Rt. Honble. Lord Viscount Nelson, he THEN died of his wounds').[4] Had he lived, how he would have been vilified!

We had great bother to see the Palazzo Sessa, but the British Consul-General kept hammering away (I hammering him!). What was the British Embassy in Nelson's day is now lived in by the Duca

[1] From Bishop Reginald Heber: 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains', in his *Hymns, etc. Brightest and Best.*

What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile, etc.

[2] Goethe had written: 'She wears a Greek garb becoming her to perfection. She then merely loosens her locks, takes a pair of shawls, and effects changes of postures, moods, gestures, mien, and appearance that make one really feel as if one were in some dream' (cited in E. Hallam Moorhouse: *Nelson's Lady Hamilton*, p. 66).

[3] Sir Gilbert Elliot, fourth Baronet (afterwards first Earl of Minto), Viceroy of Corsica, 1794-1796.

[4] The actual text of the entry in the *Victory's* logbook made by a midshipman of the watch at 5 p.m. on October 21st, 1805, reads: 'Partial firing continued until 4.30 p.m., when a victory having been reported to Admiral Lord Nelson, K.B., and Commander-in-Chief, he died of his wound.'

di Capri-Colta, his Christian name Francesco and his family name Ordile. The joint owner is the Duca Fiorito. A most magnificent staircase leads up through the centre of the Palace to all the suites of rooms. He offered to rent it to me for £200 a year, and to sell it for £4,000! Had I acquired the riches which my enemies say I have amassed by corruption, I would have bought it then and there, but, as my total private income (besides my pension) is only £302.6.8, as rendered to Lloyd George's myrmidons for the supertax collection, I bowed my regrets to the Duke and bestowed 5 francs on his Major Domo, who had shown me even where Nelson's dinner was cooked! . . .

Always yours,

Fisher

361: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
April 22nd, 1912

My beloved E.,

This loss of dear old Stead numbs me![1] Cromwell and Martin Luther rolled into one! and such a big heart! Such great emotions! YOU must write something! *All I've read quite inadequate.* The telegrams here say he was to the forefront with the women and children, putting them in the boats! *One can see him!* and probably singing 'Hallelujah'! and encouraging the band to play cheerfully! He told me he would die in his boots! *So he has!* AND A FINE DEATH! I read that as a boy he had threepence a week pocket money. One penny bought Shakespeare in weekly parts, the other two pennies to his God for missions! And the result was he became Editor of a big newspaper at 22! And he was a missionary himself all his life! Fearless even when alone, believing in his God, the God of Truth, and his enemies always rued it! He was an exploder of 'gas-bags' and the terror of liars! He was the first of the Beresfordian '*wild men*', who said 'two keels to one'! It was at Berlin the high personage said, 'Don't be frightened!' Stead said, 'Oh! no, we won't! *for every Dreadnought you build we will build two!*' THAT was the genesis of 2 keels to 1!

[1] W. T. Stead was drowned in the tragic disaster in the North Atlantic on the night of April 14th, 1912, when the White Star liner *Titanic*, on her maiden voyage, ploughed into an iceberg and sank with the loss of 1517 lives. Stead and Fisher had been 'firm friends' since they had collaborated in the 'Truth about the Navy' series in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which had sparked the Navy Scare of 1884. See Fisher's tribute to Stead in *Memories*, pp. 262-3.

I have a note of it at the time for my *Reflections* (now in progress!). But, my dear friend of friends, put your concise pen to paper for our Cromwellian saint. He deserves it!

Ever yours,

Fisher

362: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Naples
April 22nd, 1912

My dear Winston,

I have only just this moment received your letter of April 12th sent me by a special messenger by our Ambassador at Rome, and he calls for the answer to go by a King's Messenger at 5 p.m. to-day, so I have not much time for reflection; but no reflection is required, as the whole matter of your letter is absolutely without difficulty, and it is just astounding how all the arguments you use are precisely identical with those employed by me with the support of Lord Kelvin in the verbal and informal discussions that took place on the ever memorable meetings with that great man in regard to the *Dreadnought* design.

But let us first clear off what has to be said in reply to your remarks on Hankey, Sir Hedworth Meux, Sir Berkeley Milne, and Ottley.[1] I wrote to Ottley and told him he was a d—d fool, so I need say no more about him. As to Hankey, I made the same answer as in your letter under reply, so we are agreed there also. I regret that in regard to what you say and what you have done in the appointments of Sir Hedworth Meux, Sir Berkeley Milne, and Sir Reginald Custance,[2] I

[1] Churchill had written: 'I will consider about Hankey and whether I can do anything. Don't you think he had better win his spurs first? An extraordinary blunder was made in letting Ottley go, and I am far from satisfied with the behaviour of these great firms like Armstrong's, in persuading valuable officers to withdraw their services from the Crown. The Treasury were, however, so stupid, that I could not blame Ottley . . . You will see that I have provided both for Milne and Meux adequately, but not inordinately.'

[2] In his House of Commons speech of March 18th, Churchill had announced the appointment of a committee of inquiry, with Custance to preside, into 'the whole system of the entry and education of cadets and midshipmen . . . this inquiry implies no departure from, or reversal of, the policy of naval training instituted in 1902, but, rather, is calculated to give full effect to it'. The Committee issued two interim reports in the summer of 1912 and its final report in March 1913. To Fisher's great surprise few changes were recommended. 'Of course, everyone supposed that when Sir R. Custance was made President of a Committee of Enquiry that it meant the downfall of the scheme in view of his bitter attacks in *Blackwood* and other periodicals on a "Retrograde Admiralty", etc. Practically the scheme emerges unimpaired and consequently greatly strengthened by its resistance to its bitterest opponent' (Fisher to Leyland, October 31st, 1912). But Fisher need not have been surprised. See above, p. 440, n. 1.

fear this must be my last communication with you in any matter at all. I am sorry for it, but I consider you have betrayed the Navy in these three appointments, and what the pressure could have been to induce you to betray your trust is beyond my comprehension. *You are aware that Sir Berkeley Milne is unfitted to be the Senior Admiral afloat, as you have now made him.* You are aware that Sir E. Poë should have been Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, failing your promise to Admiral Egerton, and you must have been as cognizant as I am of Custance's views and animus. Even supposing McKenna had any faults (*which I do not admit*), yet he steadfastly declined pressure, to his own hurt, to make Beresford an Admiral of the Fleet. It is the deepest disappointment to me that you have not been able to see your way to resist pressure. Anyhow, all I can do is to avoid any further communication with the Admiralty. The mischief is done. '*Vestigia nulla retrorsum*'!

To resume about designs of new ships:[1] I have plainly indicated in previous letters that the path is plain and clear.

I. There MUST be the 15-inch gun.
II. There MUST be sacrifice of armour.
III. There MUST be only a 4-inch armament for anti-torpedo purposes, and unassociated with armour.
IV. There MUST be further VERY GREAT INCREASE OF SPEED.
V. The ONE thing to armour is the motive power of the ship. D—N ALL THE REST!!! But your speed *must* vastly exceed [that of] your possible enemy!
VI. A low-lying target. Look at the original *Dreadnought*. The silhouette is a minimum.
VII. SIZE and SUB-DIVISION to an extent that will cause deep cursing by all on board; but it will be WAR as opposed to comfort in peace.

I am glad you appreciate Jellicoe. You have practically annihilated him by your appointments of Meux and Milne. I *can't believe that you foresee all the consequences!*

There are splendid officers of superior rank in the Navy, but alas! in a naval disaster there is no time to send for a Roberts to retrieve the incompetence of a Buller! *You have arranged a Colenso!* I am going

[1] Churchill had given his thoughts on the battleships of the 1912-1913 programme – 15-inch primary armament, 4-inch secondary armament, heavy armour protection over the vitals, up half a knot in speed to 22, the reduction of the silhouette to the 'absolute minimum' – and asked Fisher for his views.

to transfer my body and my money to the United States — I can't remedy what has been done — and it's no d—d use squealing!

A NAVAL COLENSO IS IRREPARABLE, IRREMEDIABLE, ETERNAL!

Adieu.

Yours,

Fisher

I have finally decided not to return to England. I shall be here some little time longer with Lady Fisher, and then to Lucerne. I note your incisive criticism of Custance in this letter of yours just received: 'It is pathetic to see a clever man like Custance serenely plodding away with a roasted-chestnut argument for slow ships and weak guns at a moment when the absolute victory of the heavy projectile over almost any armour now afloat glares us in the face'! But ask the Prime Minister if HE thinks Custance 'clever'! when he recalls his aimless memorandum read out at the Beresford Enquiry!

Also, I ought to thank you for your words as to myself, that 'the adoption *on a great scale of the Big Gun* in such good time' is one of the 'finest acts of foresight and wisdom by which your naval administration has been distinguished'.

363: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Naples
April 22nd, 1912

Most Private and Confidential

My beloved Pamela,

. . . Winston calmly dismisses the appointments of Sir Hedworth Meux, Sir Berkeley Milne, and Sir Reginald Custance by the casual remark in a paragraph at the end of his long letter that he had provided for them adequately but not inordinately!!! It means that Sir Hedworth Meux will be the First Sea Lord when the Unionist Government comes in, and he and Custance will cancel the work of the last 8 years! He ignores my pressing letter to him when I heard of Milne working the backstairs long ago — and neither Winston or Bridgeman or Battenberg say one word in reply to my letters to each of them on the all-important point of who is to be Commander-in-Chief in case of war. If Poë had got Portsmouth, then Meux was practically shelved . . . It would not be patriotic of me to make a public exposé — the mischief is an accomplished fact. I am not going

to mention the business to another soul. I don't think Esher is quite safe — also he is playing up to the King. I heard the King sent for Winston and insisted on Sir Hedworth Meux and would not sanction Poë, and presumably the Prime Minister acquiesced, but it is purely a 'hear-say' letter that told me all this. Custance has already let loose the Civil Service Commissioners on Dartmouth and Osborne, he well knowing they hate the *bouleversement* in education which those establishments are bringing about all over the Country. It's so odd that I should get since writing to you the other day a long letter from Pretyman, M.P., warning me that W.C. was unstable.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

Also Winston cracks up Sir W. May in his letter to me. Of course Reggie must not let a soul know he has a copy of my letter to W.C., but I want Reggie to be behind the scenes. . . .

364: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
April 25th, 1912

My beloved E.,

. . . When I was a Delegate at the Hague Conference of 1899 — the first Conference — I had very animated conversations, which, however, to my lasting regret it was deemed inexpedient to place on record (on account of their violence, I believe!), regarding '*trading with the enemy*.' I stated the primordial fact that 'the *essence of war is violence; moderation in war is imbecility*'. And then in my remarks I went on to observe, as is stated by Mr. Norman Angell in *The Great Illusion*, where he holds me up as a terror! and as misguided! Perhaps I went a little too far when I said I would boil the prisoners in oil and murder the innocent in cold blood, etc., etc., etc. But it's quite silly not to make war damnable to the whole mass of your enemy's population, which of course is the secret of maintaining the right of capture of private property at sea. As you say, it must now be proclaimed in the most public and most authoritative manner that direct and indirect trade between Great Britain, *including every part of the British Empire*, and Germany must cease in time of war. I certainly *have* met d—d fools who have imagined a state of war in which Great Britain and Germany are the only belligerent Powers; but this

hallucination (they have admitted frankly to me) involves as a necessity that the rulers of France and Russia are senile and our own Foreign Office the facile dupe of some Marschal von Bieberstein! As Macaulay says, 'Every schoolboy knows' (even Beresford knows!) that France and Russia are both saturated with the conviction that they MUST fight when England fights! It's transparently vital to both of them that they must! King Edward told me to ask Isvolsky to lunch at Carlsbad together with Pahlen. I can't, of course, put on paper what he said, nor can I repeat Hanotaux's dictum, which everlastingly governs France. But if, as you imply in your letter, there are Englishmen of influence who really can conceive a localized conflict between Great Britain and Germany, then all I can say is we are in a d—d bad way, as it shows utter idiocy in our ruling men! But as I've often and often told you before, I never despair. We're the Lost Ten Tribes and Providence is guiding our great England!

'Time and the ocean, and some guiding star,
In high cabal have made us what we are'!

And when war *does* come, 'MIGHT IS RIGHT!' *and the Admiralty will know what to do!* Nevertheless, it is a most serious drawback not making public to the world beforehand what we mean by war! It is astounding how even very great men don't understand WAR! You must go to the foreigner to appreciate our surpassing predominance as a nation. I was closeted for two hours lately — in a locked room — with a great Foreign Ambassador, who quoted great names to me as being in agreement with him that never in the history of the world was the British Empire (as at the present moment) surpassed in power! And therefore we could do what we liked!

Yours always,

Fisher

Postscript. I fully agree with you that the schemes of the General Staff of the Army are grotesque. Their projects last August, had we gone to war, were wild in the extreme. You will remember a famous interview we two had with King Edward in his cabin on board the Royal Yacht — how he stamped on the idea (that then enthused the War Office mind) of England once more engaged in a great Continental War! '*Marlboroughs cheap to-day*'!! was the kettle of fish advertised by the militarists! *and Repington!*

I walked the sands of Scheveningen with General Gross von Schwartzhoff in June 1899. The German Emperor said he was a

greater than Moltke. He was the Military German Delegate at the Hague Conference; he was designated as Chief of the General Staff at Berlin, but he was burnt to death [China, 1900] instead. I had done him a very good turn indeed, so he opened his heart to me. There was no German Navy then. We were doing Fashoda; and he expatiated on the role of the British Army — how the absolute supremacy of the British Navy gave it such inordinate power far beyond its numerical strength, because 200,000 men embarked in transports, and God only knowing where they might be put ashore, was a weapon of enormous influence, and capable of deadly blows — occupying perhaps Antwerp, Flushing, etc. (*but of course he only was thinking of the Cotentin Peninsula*), or landing 90 miles from Berlin on that 14 miles of sandy beach [in Pomerania], impossible of defence against a Battle Fleet sweeping with devastating shells the flat country for miles, like a mower's scythe — no fortifications able to withstand projectiles of 1,450 lbs.!

Yes, dear, dear friend, you are so right! The average man is incapable of a wide survey! He looks through a pinhole and only sees just a little bit much magnified! Napoleon and Cromwell! *Where are they?*

[Note on an enclosure]

From a great authoress with £10,000 a year! who sent me some roses yesterday [enclosure follows]:

My dear Admiral,

Just a few roses to bid you 'Goodbye' with their own complement of thorns, as you seem to treasure these latter whilst I only recognize the roses of life. Addio.

'She sent me roses with thorns beset,
The blossoms I cast away,
But the thorns were grasped — for Life's inset
To a frame of Endless Fray
To uphold the Right, reprove the Wrong —
Thus I have used my day
In wearing thoughts both deep and strong
To keep the Foe at bay.
And only at intervals rare, renowned
Sympathy whispers to say —
"A greater than thou with Thorns was crowned
But in a different way." '

365: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Naples
April 28th, 1912

My dear Friend,

Though you differed from Stead, you both were very little different from each other, both of you 'Dreadnoughts' as against the evil, and for the good, fearing no power on earth and wanting no man's favour! It's lovely to read that 2,500 friends attended his memorial service at the Westminster Chapel! It says, 'NO MORE COULD GET IN'! Why! That's more than attended any memorial service I know of at the Westminster Chapel . . . I love Queen Alexandra for sending her Equerry, General Brocklehurst, to represent her at the memorial service. It's a puny spirit that don't recognize greatness in any social stratum, however low down! I have cause to keep his memory dear. He resisted most insidious blandishments even only to be silent — but he fought for me tooth and nail! as, indeed, you are again like him in so doing! . . .

[Arthur] Lee's friend Roosevelt and Senator Lodge, his great ally, who emasculated the Arbitration Treaty in the Senate, are England's two greatest enemies. I fear Roosevelt will get in, for he is the Prince of Advertisers.

'Early to bed and early to rise
Work like hell to advertise.'

And now we also have our Beresford! He really is splendid at advertising!

SECRET. The Prime Minister invited me to the Defence Committee last Thursday, but I am doing a little of 'Achilles sulking in the tent', as he and Winston, to serve their political ends, have been doing a bit of truckling lately, and I have 'let fly', which won't make me any more popular among the pimps and parasites!

This is *very, very* private, so please burn and not mention a word! *I know I can trust you* — but it is really damnable how men can be brave in December and funkers in April! Perhaps I ought to have been on the spot! HOWEVER, BREATHE NOT A WORD!

I've two days ago by King's Messenger got home eight sheets on the subject you have so much at heart, of German annexation of Belgium and Holland! It won't happen while the British Navy is kept in its present position and overwhelming supremacy, which France knows is the only way to keep the German Army out of Paris. *Our soldiers are grotesque in their absurd ideas of war!* but, happily,

they are powerless. It is Antwerp we shall seize, and not go fooling on the Vosges Frontier, and the Germans will smell Hell when they find us at Cuxhaven! *For God's sake, burn all this.* The great advantage of absence is '*litera scripta manet*'; the effect of a personal discussion passes off, the written word remains.

Yours always,

F.

366: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
April 29th, 1912

SECRET

My beloved E.,

. . . I can picture old Stead every moment from 10:25 p.m. till the *Titanic* sank at 2:20 a.m.! One man relates how he (Stead) was cheering everyone up and, depend on it, he enjoyed the band playing till the ship went down! Old Stead only feared God. He feared no one else! When I was at my zenith, he told me to remember Nebuchadnezzar, but HE never needed to be told. He was humble-minded from his mother's womb![1]

I've marked this letter '*Secret*' because I am going to tell you things! You say to me — '*Come home!*' You remind me of '*personal influence*'. I KNOW IT! Three days ago I was invited to name one of three week-ends in June to meet Bonar Law and F. E. Smith at a country house — no one else. Day before yesterday Winston Churchill asked me. Hardly a week passes without such similar pressure from most influential quarters — '*Why don't I come home and smash and pulverize?*' Of course, they one and all exaggerate — that in ten minutes I could '*sweep the board*', and so on! I know *exactly* what I can do. *I've been fighting 50 years!* BUT I DON'T WANT A PERSONAL VICTORY! Neither do I wish to lower the King's prestige. *I should have to.* He has said things in his unguarded and loquacious way that he would have to take back. His sycophants are playing hell with him. A weathercock would be his crest if his character had to be represented. I have got his own letters — DOZENS. He tried to bluff McKenna into making Beresford an Admiral of the Fleet. McKenna told him he would see him d—d first! So the Prime Minister (*for political favours*

[1] Further on Stead, to Esther Meynell on May 5th: 'Old Stead should have been saved instead of some dear old woman whose time was up – *his wasn't!* You ballot for the hundred best books! Why shouldn't the passengers ballot amongst themselves on the first day of the voyage how they'll be saved!'

to come!) lent himself to dirty tricks! and when the opportunity arose, McKenna was shunted! Winston, alas! (as I have had to tell him) feared for his wife the social ostracism of the Court and succumbed to the appointments of the two Court favourites recently made — *a wicked wrong in both cases!* Winston has sacrificed the Country to the Court, and gone back on his brave deeds of December 5th last! so I'VE DONE WITH HIM! I've told him to send me no more King's Messengers — and Bridgeman and Battenberg are to blame. They ought to have left the Admiralty. They each wrote to me beforehand and I answered in unmeasured terms; but I suppose they both funked! There really are very few really brave men in the world! You see why I mark this letter '*Secret*'. Winston writes to me most effusively, but it's no good —

'*Facta non verba*'

He 'pump-ships' down my back, but it's no use! Some people can't resist hot water down their backs. 'The adoption (of the "*Big Gun*") on a great scale and in such good time is one of the finest acts of foresight and wisdom by which your Naval Administration has been distinguished.' (Yes! and all my colleagues every d—d soul against it! *That was the beauty of it!*) 'It is pathetic to see a clever man like Custance serenely plodding away with a roasted-chestnut argument for slow ships and weak guns (and Sir William White with him!!!) at a moment when the absolute victory of the heavy projectile over almost any armour now afloat glares us in the face.' 'Thanks to you (YES, AND ME ALONE!) we shall have 16 of these 13½ gun ships before our German friends have anything heavier than the 12-inch' (with a projectile *far more* than 50 per cent less powerful!). 'It looks more like murder than war!'

I quote all this *in extenso* from Winston's letter just come to show his desire to be friends, and he puts the whole new designs in my hands! And he sends me the innermost secrets of war to criticize. Nevertheless, he has sold his Country for a mess of pottage, so I'VE DONE WITH HIM! I am going to take my body and what little money I have (my private income is £302.6.9!) to the United States in the near future. It would be no use my coming home. *The mischief is done!* Milne, an utterly useless Commander (Asquith leaned across McKenna on the Front Bench and said so to Winston), is now the Senior Admiral afloat, and Hedworth Lambton's appointment to Portsmouth renders him eligible to be First Sea Lord, *and he will be* when the Unionist Government come in — a post in which he would

ruin the Navy, but what's the good of my squealing! NEITHER WOULD IT BE PATRIOTIC! The Providence of God may take both Milne and Lambton into another world any day! *I believe in Providence!* Nearly all my enemies have gone to Hell!

You are quite right in your opinion of B. [Battenberg].[1] I told Winston that he was only a superior sort of *commis voyageur*, but *quite excellent* at *details* of organization, which is what you require in the Second Sea Lord! From patriotic motives I've given Winston of my very best in the replies going to him this day from Brindisi by King's Messenger, as regards designs and policy and fighting measures. So far he has swallowed whole all I've given him.

Always yours,

Fisher

P.S. *Please don't mention the contents of this letter to a living soul!*

367: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Naples
May 6th, 1912

Dearest Cis,

. . . I am so delighted at sweet Jane having gone 'on the turf' and being a member of the private stand at Newmarket! What would William Penn say of a Philadelphian doing such a thing! . . .

Well! as regards Winston Churchill, '*amantium irae amoris integratio est*'. No doubt, I sent him an awful letter, and he really has replied very nicely that no matter what I like to say to him, he is going to stick to me and support all my schemes and always maintain that I am a genius and the greatest naval administrator, etc., etc., etc. But what he has done was wise, crafty, and Machiavellian, and he says, or rather implies, that putting Hedworth Lambton into Portsmouth was dead against both the King's and Lambton's wishes, meaning thereby that Lambton wanted to be Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet in December *next year*, instead of Jellicoe, as was arranged for in the memorable coup of last December. Also that Milne going to the Mediterranean is not what I supposed, as he has only the Cruiser Squadron and not the battleships, which are under

[1] 'I hear that Winston thinks Battenberg a sort of St. Vincent. Francis [Knollys] told me this . . . If that *is* his view, he will have a rude awakening one of these days. The man is just above the average, and that is all' (Esher to Fisher, April 20th, 1912).

another Admiral junior to Jellicoe, and that Custance is tied hand and foot not to alter my scheme of entry and education, and that he leans more and more on Jellicoe in accordance with my advice. *All this is very sweet,* so *burn!*

He starts in the Admiralty Yacht for the Mediterranean on May 8th, but I've TWICE told him I will not go with him, *and I won't!* Whatever he may say, there's no doubt he has succumbed to Court influence *where McKenna would not! and* DID NOT! and so I am not so cordial towards Winston as I was, nor shall I ever be again! He need not have employed any one of the three (Lambton, Milne, or Custance), as there were three far more worthy and more entitled *who he knew of*! The more I see of politicians of both sides, the more sick I am of them and the more dishonourable they prove themselves to be. If I consulted my own inclinations, I would never again set foot in England (*and I told Winston so in my letter*), and remove my body to the U.S.A.!

Lord Esher writes entreating me to come to the Committee of Defence, and the Prime Minister asked me, but I sent 8 sheets instead. '*Litera scripta manet.*' There is no shorthand writer and the verbal discussions pass away, and I was in a minority of one, but my words now stand on record! *And they will have to be agreed to!* Not yet, but later on! . . .

Your loving father, F.

I've just sent a telegram to Queen Alexandra on this sad anniversary when I lost the greatest friend ever man had! *and she told me so!*

368: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Naples
May 9th, 1912

Dearest Cis,

They will all enjoy Jane at Greenwich, although it's only for one night, as she's a prime favourite in the Fisher family! She has 'caught on'! . . .

To my astonishment Saxton Noble[1] turned up at this hotel. He had come about some business at the works here at Pozzuoli. He was

[1] Afterwards Sir Saxton Noble, third Baronet; son of Sir Andrew Noble and a managing director of Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co., Ltd.

very pleasant and cordial, but kept me up too late talking! Although my surplus *private* income after allowances to D. & P. is only £302.16.10 (as given for the super-tax the other day!), yet Saxton considers I did right in not accepting in 1886 [1887] the Whitworth offer, which would have made me now a multi-millionaire! I think Saxton right on the whole! I suppose I should now be an obese M.P.! with a house on Park Lane! However, probably old Vavasseur wouldn't have had so much money, or Saxton either! and I think that was in his mind by some words he let slip that he was glad I didn't!

I've had a very nice telegram from Winston. *However, there is no getting over the fact that he truckled to Court influence* when McKenna, under GREATER pressure, DID NOT! and I have rubbed this into W.C. and he don't like it! McKENNA WAS SPLENDID! I will NOT go in the Admiralty Yacht. W.C. is coming out for 7 or 8 weeks, I believe. Still, for the good of the Navy I am reluctantly feeling compelled to continue my advice to him as to new Dreadnought and other vital fighting business.

Your loving father,

F.

P.S. For FIVE days now I've not been out of the hotel, and working from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. on my papers, and only a few minutes to breakfast and lunch! I've got them all tabulated now very nearly.

369: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Naples
May 15th, 1912

My beloved E.,

You are *now* responsible! I've condoned Winston's damnable lapse! but I've 'rubbed it in' while doing so that it is quite incomprehensible to me how he could be a Hero last December and a Poltroon in April! and that ever since Cromwell it has always been '*the People's Navy*' and '*the Court Army*'! and no Admiralty ever yet in history were sent on board the Flagship of the Second-in-Command while the Sovereign flew his standard in the ship of the Commander-in-Chief![1] *It's quite wrong and unprecedented!* but I fear Bridgeman and

[1] On the occasion of a visit of inspection to the Home Fleets in Weymouth Bay, May 8th-11th, the King accompanied the ships to sea for squadron firing (May 10th). He embarked in Callaghan's flagship, the *Neptune*, while Churchill embarked in the *Hercules*, Jellicoe's flagship.

Battenberg are powerless against Winston! Winston told Jellicoe that I was THE ONE he entirely and fully leaned on! and yet you see he sold me! (He told Jellicoe this ONLY last week in confidence!) Jellicoe has an unbounded admiration of Winston! He says he's wonderful!

Well! as you say, every blessed thing at Weymouth ABSOLUTELY dates from 1909, except the aviation, and even that I pressed to its present condition dead against old A. K. Wilson and his colleagues, but I wrote to Winston so strongly that he took the bit between his teeth on that subject! And you ask me the question, '*How goes it for the future?*'

Well! Lloyd George is the real man, and so far, judging from his most intimate conversation with me, *all is well!* Remember, he absolutely controls Winston! And Winston told me himself he never stirs hand or foot without Lloyd George! BURN THIS.

Apropos of all this, I've been specially invited to meet Bonar Law, F. E. Smith, Garvin (and another I am never to name!) at a weekend meeting [July 29th] — *no others*. I was asked twice before — and again now repeated; but I think it best to abstain. I think you will approve of my not going.

I have declined to go with W.C. in the Admiralty Yacht. He is coming out here. Don't mention to him or anyone else, please, that I was asked. . . .

Yours,

F.

370: TO GERARD FIENNES

Naples
May 18th, 1912

Private. Please burn.

My dear Fiennes,

It's quite interesting to read, as suggested to me by [Augustine] Birrell, M.P., at page 110, Vol. XI, of the *Biographical Dictionary*, published A.D. 1762 (which no doubt you could see at the London Library) that Sir William Temple renounced public affairs in 1680 and went into retirement, 'but was frequently consulted by those at the helm, especially after the Revolution [of 1688], and was even visited for that purpose'! I've just had a letter [of May 15th] that the Prime Minister and W.C. are coming direct here from England to spend 'a few days' with me and to talk of things that can't be written about! (I suppose the Supplementary Estimates, types of

new ships, etc.) A very cordial note from Asquith (I got before) expressing his desire to see me, and now Winston writes that they are both coming in Admiralty Yacht, and that my resentment would be deserved respecting the appointments of Custance, Meux, and Milne if the consequences were to be such as I apprehend, but that 'the future of the Navy rests in the hands of men in whom your confidence is as strong as mine, and no change of Government would carry with it any change of policy in this respect'. (So I suppose he has squared Bonar Law & Co. in regard to the future!!!) They arrive here in the Admiralty Yacht on May 23, *but this is all private.* However, if you see the arrival of the *Enchantress* at Naples in the newspaper, with the Prime Minister and W.C., then it's public property, and also that I am here! I have not told anyone but you.[1] I thought it would interest you and might be useful as a piece of news, if you can get it by other means from Naples *when they arrive.* . . .

Yours always,

F.

371: TO LADY FISHER

Grand Hotel National
Lucerne
[May 27th, 1912]

Dearest Kitty,

Letter from Beatrix. Mannheim is an ideal place for them! Reginald [Neeld] lays down the law to all those hags at the Hôtel du Nord, and they listen to him with awe! That's how the world is governed! 'Lesser fleas have little fleas,' etc., etc. . . .

I own up that it was extremely unpleasant in the second-class when so jammed up with 8 people going in and out all night long and the windows closed! But there's great pleasure in saving all those pounds, which more than paid my excellent doctor's bill, and I got a splendid examination of my *corpus* thrown in. He really seemed so interested about my age and had a second go at my heart after I told him! and then he preached me that sermon I sent you![2] . . .

[1] The fact is that he promptly told his son, Esher, White, Yexley, Spender, and possibly others! 'I have no idea what it is all about', he confided to Spender on May 22nd.

[2] Fisher had the doctor because of 'a bit of a chill'. 'He told me everything was splendidly sound and especially my heart, and if only now I would do no more work, I might live for "MANY, MANY *happy years*"!! But if I went to hard work again, then no one could tell! I think there's a great deal in what he said. All the same, I quite expect I shall be hauled out next Friday; *but I shall be serenely happy if I am not!*' (Fisher to Mrs. Cecil Fisher, June 9th, 1912).

I'm perfectly well again now, and I confess the air here is very exhilarating and invigorating after Naples, and I *eat prodigiously*, but I don't smoke or drink as yet.

I've met a dear old Englishman, whom I knew last year here, who has been 26 years in the Argentine and made his fortune there. He lived 50 miles from the nearest railway. The same old story of how a supine English Government gave up the complete hold and control of that marvellous country, which he says is really stocked with British gold and really ruled by British enterprise. . . .

Best love to all.

Y.l.h.

J. F.

372: TO LADY FISHER

Lucerne
May 28th, 1912

Dearest Kitty,

I was '*worn out*' when I wrote yesterday, so I expect my letter was very mixed! I've had a splendid sleep and am all right now. Mr. and Mrs. Demechili think I look 'VERY MUCH YOUNGER' than when I went away 5 months ago! *but everyone always says that sort of thing!* . . .

I hardly think I shall come home till the end of July, but possibly a flying visit of three days at end of June. *All is most uncertain.* Nothing is yet fixed, *except without any doubt THEY* ARE FIXED *in wanting to have me back!* Why I want to go to Kilverstone till next spring or summer is that I am out of reach of the journalists and 'button-holers', who would infest me at Richmond, and especially on the telephone! *Thank goodness no telephone at Kilverstone!*

W.C. said the King was always talking about me to him, and had acknowledged how much I had done, but that I was absolutely wedded to certain ideas he couldn't approve of. W.C. turned round to him and said that everything now that was said at home and abroad of the 'PRESENT OVERWHELMING SUPREMACY and *efficiency of the British Navy*' was SOLELY and ONLY and ENTIRELY due to me! and that 'there would shortly be 16 ships with 13½-inch guns, when not a single German ship had anything but a 12-inch gun, which, compared to the British 13½-inch gun, was only a pea-shooter!' and he said the King shut up then. I also heard indirectly from Esher that Winston Churchill always sticks up for me to all the Court people besides the King! *About the only grateful politician I have ever met!*

(*except Lord Spencer*). Selborne, Cawdor, Balfour, and *all the rest* have *NEVER* said ONE word in my defence! *I speak of men as I find them*, and no such black ingratitude has ever been shown me in this world as the Tory Party have shown me! It is all in black and white, and they will all be exposed in due course! I don't wonder at the Country becoming socialistic! . . .

If I don't have everything exactly as I want, I shan't come home! *I've told them this!* and, of course, it's unpleasant for them having to cancel arrangements partly carried out, so they may yet think it too big a price and so have Selborne instead of me. . . .

Y.l.h. J. F.

373: TO GERARD FIENNES

Lucerne
May 28th, 1912

Burn.
Secret and Private

My beloved Fiennes,

I was nearly kidnapped and carried off in the Admiralty Yacht! They were very sweet about it! My old cabin as First Sea Lord all arranged for me! I had a good time and came out on top! The Prime Minister is 'dead on' for my coming back, and he has put things so forcibly to me that, with great reluctance to re-enter the battle field, I probably shall do so! *But not a word of this*, except perhaps in *the very deepest confidence* to dear Garvin. I had great talks with the Prime Minister upon every sort of subject ('China to Peru'!). No doubt I am '*all there*' with him! (This sounds rather egotistical, I fear!) Don't breathe a word. I just send you this line to say all went well and I am here at Lucerne. They pressed me for three days to go with them, but I had very good public reasons for not doing so. Winston came ashore with me at 2 a.m. the last night to have last words with me! I thought to myself what a story dear old Stead would have made out of that episode of the early morning hours! I grieve very much for him. He was a great wonder and very attractive!

Yours always, Fisher

They invented a lovely story that the Admiralty Yacht was driven into Naples by bad weather, and every Italian newspaper had it! It's very curious how every one is always so afraid of its being known that I have anything to do with them! . . .

374: TO LADY FISHER

Lucerne
June 13th, 1912

Dearest Kitty,

I've not as yet heard from any of the authorities, which I take it as a sign whether they can agree to my terms, *or they would have written to say that all is at an end!* I've had two very nice letters from Sir Francis Hopwood[1] (*who is the* 'BRAIN' *of the business!*). He says in one letter, 'Probably you will be attacked on the flank', meaning that my patriotism will be appealed to so as to make me waive some of my conditions,[2] and he adds that he personally sees no objection to my proposals. In another letter he says, 'You will do a great public service by taking this problem in hand,' and that I am THE one to overcome 'official lethargy, obstruction, funkers, and talkers', and that 'Achilles coming from his tent will be welcomed', etc., etc. I tell you all this because all of it very complimentary, but yet I am not going to start out on a big thing such as this is unless I am allowed to have my own complete way untrammelled. I know it's dictating terms, but I tell them to take Selborne instead — that's all — and he won't trouble them! and I expect it will end in that way, and I am quite content, as I have a real disinclination to re-enter the field of battle again and to get mixed up, as I assuredly must, in all sorts of wire-pullings and cajolings, of which I've had quite enough in the past. I would reduce it to a minimum by living down at Kilverstone for some months at first to begin with, but as sure as fate I should be drawn into the vortex against all my efforts after those first months, and would have to live at Richmond, whether I liked it or not! . . .

I really am very keen on your discovering a suitable house for us near Richmond, as it seems the *ideal* spot for us, and I could have Knollys, Esher, and others so easily down for a weekend or even to spend the day, and yet it's too far to be button-holed very easily, and also far enough to avoid Society invitations! I love the Norfolk air, but it's too far away for *anno domini* or to get people to come and see one.

[1] Sir Francis Hopwood (afterwards first Baron Southborough), Additional Civil Lord of the Admiralty (a new post), 1912-1917 – 'an A1 man!' and 'a great friend of mine' (Fisher to Pamela Blackett, May 18th, 1911; to Cecil Fisher, January 12th, 1912).

[2] A most eloquent letter of Churchill's, dated June 11th, was en route to Fisher. It concluded: 'I recognize it is little enough I can offer you. But your gifts, your force, your hopes, belong to the Navy, with or without return; and as your most sincere admirer, and as the head of the Naval Service, I claim them now, knowing well you will not grudge them. You need a plough to draw. Your propellers are racing in air' (Churchill: *The World Crisis*, I, 133).

I enclose you a letter from Cecil. It's very pleasant that he's so devoted to Jane. I wish she could make him give up his smoking, but she 'just thinks him perfect' (so she wrote to me in one of her letters lately!!!). . . .

Y.l.h.

F.

375: TO LADY FISHER

Lucerne
June 17th, 1912

PRIVATE

Dearest Kitty,

. . . I think you must be in collusion with the English Chaplain here! for in his extempore, very eloquent sermon yesterday morning, he fixed his eyes steadfast on me and made use of the following language: 'No man still in the possession of all his powers and vitality has any right to say, "*Now I'm going to rest, for I've had a hard life*", for he owes a duty to his Country and to his fellow-men.' Of course, it was an arrow shot at a venture like the one that killed Ahab! as I met him afterwards, when I was calling on Mrs. Dickson, and he was very meek and nervous to a degree!

I expect the end of this week will see the matter settled. I wrote 8 sheets, I think, yesterday to Hopwood and 9 sheets to-day to Winston Churchill, in reply to a long letter from him, *but all this is very private and secret.* I really am reluctant about it all, but they are so pressing me and shoving me into it, and I really have to admit that they are right when they all unanimously say to me that no one else can do it — and also the Prime Minister presses me — but I never should be in the position you mention respecting Sir J. Fullerton of 'nothing to do', for I enjoy every minute of the day every day I live, and am absolutely content and happy! . . .

Best love to all.

Y.l.h.

J. F.

. . . This place is just absolutely perfection now. Such splendid strawberries and peaches, all free!!!

376: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Hotel Curzon
Mayfair, London
June 21st, 1912

Dearest Cis,

AT LAST fame has come to me!!! As I was going to interview Sir E. Grey, Lord Haldane, Lloyd George, McKenna, Sir Arthur Nicolson, and Sir Robert Chalmers,[1] I thought I would go to Solomon en route and get a swagger 'buttonhole'! When I asked what I had to pay, 'My Lord, we could not think of charging your Lordship anything'!!! The nearest approach to this before was when I saw my photograph on a pound of starch!!! . . .

I've had a hectic time; no sleep for three nights now.

Lloyd George, Lord Redesdale, and Sir Robert Chalmers, and Winston are coming to Kilverstone on July 20. I am taking down to-day a ton of champagne, port, sherry, whiskey, and claret. *Private.* Winston's wife seriously ill, so he can't come as intended to-morrow. I've got all I wanted, but I am MOST DEPRESSED at relinquishing my freedom! I feel as if I had been pushed over the precipice. . . .

Your loving father,

F.

377: TO LORD STAMFORDHAM

Kilverstone Hall
June 25th, 1912

. . . *For your own private eye I enclose a rough copy of my memorandum* to Winston.[2] It's very secret.

J.

I *immensely* enjoyed my lunch *and seeing you again.*

[1] Sir Arthur Nicolson, eleventh Baronet (afterwards first Baron Carnock), Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1910-1916; Chalmers was Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, 1911-1913.

[2] Churchill intended the memorandum for the Cabinet. It was a defence of the regrouping of the Fleet in the spring which had denuded the Mediterranean Fleet of its battleships, while leaving a cruiser squadron at Malta. The 'abandoning the Mediterranean' policy had aroused strong opposition in the press, in the Cabinet (McKenna, Harcourt, e.g.), and among influential statesmen like Esher. A crucial C.I.D. meeting on July 4th (Fisher's first attendance in eighteen months) reached a compromise, which was announced by Churchill in the House of Commons on July 22nd: the cruiser squadron in the Mediterranean would be strengthened by four battle cruisers. Both sides claimed victory.

[Enclosure]

Battleships and Trade
in the
Mediterranean

The immense development of the submarine precludes the presence of heavy ships of war or the passage of trade through the Mediterranean Sea. It equally precludes the capture of Malta by an invading force. Until, then, the hostile flotillas of submarines and destroyers have been held up or destroyed, no war fleet or trade fleet can be at large in the Mediterranean (*or in any narrow sea*), nor dare any troop-laden transports leave their own harbours. The late First Sea Lord (Sir Arthur Wilson) dealt adequately with this matter in his memorandum on Sir Ian Hamilton's book with Lord Haldane's preface. He showed how submarines precluded the invasion of England. Captain S. S. Hall, R.N., equally showed it as regards Malta in a recent lecture to its Governor and the officers of its garrison. If it be observed that Christian nations (though pretty bad) would be shocked by the murder of defenceless trading vessels carrying our food from the Black Sea, would anyone hesitate to send to perdition some two thousand soldiers packed in a transport trying to invade England, as compared with only the dozen men forming the crew of the grain ship?

The essence of war is violence and moderation in war is imbecility! Nor would it be waste of torpedoes to use them to sink these valuable cargoes of grain and merchandise. A line of submarines and destroyers across the [Strait] of Gibraltar or the Malta Channel or other narrow spaces need only sink a few ships to stop the trade effectually. (We require adequate flotillas of submarines and destroyers at Gibraltar, Malta, and Alexandria to protect these places, etc.)

As to the policy of reducing the Mediterranean Fleet, the matter is most simple. The margin of power in the North Sea is irreducible and requires this addition of the Mediterranean battleships. Is it proposed to build another fleet for the Mediterranean, and also perhaps for China, and so on? *We cannot have everything or be strong everywhere.* It is futile to be strong in the subsidiary theatre of war and not overwhelmingly supreme in the decisive theatre. The moral effect of an omnipresent fleet is very great, but it cannot be weighed — at least in the Cabinets of the Powers — against a main fleet known to be ready to strike and able to strike hard.

Fisher
24.6.12

378: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Kilverstone Hall
June 27th, 1912

Dearest Cis,

I had another exhausting day yesterday and got back dead! I had a most affectionate meeting with Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria. They are coming over here immediately they come down to Sandringham . . . Princess Victoria, who used to be scraggy, lanky, and anaemic, has developed into an opulent figure with a rosy, plump face! She looked very handsome and I told her so, and her tall figure makes her most imposing now. I'm just going to write to her and tell her it again! *They are both very devoted friends!*

I did an immense lot of other business and was quite dead-beat in the train! I've promised to dine with Bonar Law, F. E. Smith, Garvin, Goulding, and a lot more in the House of Commons on Wednesday, July 10. I tried to get off, but couldn't! And next Tuesday I have to go to the Committee of Defence . . . Winston is just pouring things on me to do! He calls me 'Bunty'![1]

Fond love to Jane.

Your loving father, F.

379: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Kilverstone Hall
July 5th, 1912

Dearest Cis,

I had a FIERCE day at Committee of Imperial Defence [July 4th]. WE SAT THE WHOLE DAY! 'HOT WORDS'!!! and I caught the 6:37 from Liverpool Street, which gets to Thetford at 9 p.m., with a splendid dining car the whole way. Old A. K. Wilson travelled with me. We sit side by side at the Committee of Defence, exactly opposite the Prime Minister, which is a position of great advantage, as we can see both sides of the table and the light is full on our faces. When I can persuade old Wilson to agree with me (*as he did all yesterday*), we are just irresistible! (It's like those Horatii who held the bridge!) We just '*wiped*' the soldiers clean out yesterday. *It was lovely!* Old 'ard 'eart was sweet to look at! It really is great sport, but I was just dead-beat last night! They were all very cordial and affectionate to me, especially Sir E. Grey and 'Lulu' Harcourt and Lloyd George. McKenna and Winston were tearing each other's eyes out the whole

[1] 'Bunty' was the heroine of the current comedy success, *Bunty Pulls the Strings*.

time, and I had a hard matter to keep friendly with both, so didn't do so well as I might have done, as I couldn't let myself go, but old A. K. Wilson quite made up for it! . . .

Don't get taken up as a spy in Berlin. Your name is dangerous!

Your loving father,

F.

380: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
July 6th, 1912

Private

My beloved E.,

I was sorry to have no opportunity of seeing you, but I was *very* busy indeed (and really all my thoughts) with my Royal Commission.

I expect you will see that the course of action will inevitably result in what I ventured to indicate, IF ONLY the Admiralty will keep their backs to the wall, of the irreducible margin required in Home Waters. The only pity was that dear old A. K. Wilson said we were sufficiently strong for two years or more, which of course is quite true, but his saying so may prevent Lloyd George being hustled (*as he otherwise would have been*). Luckily, I prevented old A. K. W. saying even more of our present great preponderance — but let us hope 'All's well that ends well'! Ian Hamilton came in most effectively with his witnessing the armoured cruiser *Suffolk*, laden with a battalion of the Malta garrison, being twice effectually torpedoed by a submarine. However, the last paragraph in paper 92.C by the War Office was quite sufficient to render as dead as a herring any notion of Malta being taken. . . .

Yours always,

F.

I'm convinced that my always held opinion that the Committee of Imperial Defence is a 'very leaky' organization is true, and I told Seely this and how it came about.[1]

[1] Colonel John E. B. Seely (afterwards Major-General, the first Baron Mottistone) was Secretary of State for War, 1912-1914, in succession to Haldane, who became Lord Chancellor. Fisher had a point. The *Pall Mall Gazette* reported (July 9th) that it had learned 'on the best authority that in the great meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence last week the policy of abandoning the Mediterranean suffered a decisive defeat. It is believed that a British fleet is to be maintained at a one-Power standard – that is, at a strength equal to that of any other Power in the Mediterranean'. Wrote Fisher to Esher, July 12th: 'I am hoping there is going to be a fuss made over this leakage from the C.I.D., *as there is also another gross breach of confidence besides this*. I feel pretty sure myself how it happens.' Esher asked him (July 13th) '*how* things get out of the C.I.D.' There is no record of Fisher's reply.

381: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Kilverstone Hall
[ca. July 10th, 1912]

Dearest Cis,

I am so glad you saw Madame Weiss at the 'Stern'. Mother and I were the very first English to go to the 'Stern', and old Anton Weiss always used to date his prosperity from that epoch, and there is the same head waiter, I expect! I expect you had not time to take Jane for a drive to Glatzen. The walks and cafés at Marienbad, and the coffee and rolls, are unsurpassed in the whole world! And I always consider it a life-giving place, as all the great London doctors had quite given me up, and I went there [1886] because a lovely partner I used to waltz with told me to go. I was *very*, *very* ill indeed, but in 3 weeks I walked 14 miles a day! It was like the pool of Bethesda! The moment I drank the Kreuzbrünnen I began to get well!

However, there's no chance any more of my going there or anywhere else! They have got proper hold of me now and I shall die fighting! '*Death found him fighting*' will be my epitaph, like one of Nelson's Captains! I am just working like a galley-slave now — up at 5 a.m., and often sooner, and to bed at 9:30! Old Arnold White was greatly impressed by his fellow guests! They are about the 4 greatest men that exist of their type![1] Foemen worthy of one's steel! I conquered them all with great gusto! especially old Yarrow, who's as obstinate as a mule! and as clever as Archimedes! . . . I don't think Lloyd George is coming now, as we quarrelled last Thursday at the Defence Committee. I told him

'We want 8 —
and we won't wait!'[2]

Your loving father,

F.

[1] The four appear to have been Watts, Yarrow, Alexander (afterwards Sir Alexander) Gracie, a director of Cammell Laird's, Sheffield, and Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Oram, Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet, 1907-1917.

[2] This was the navalist slogan in the 1909 scare. 'The Prime Minister and Winston would not listen at Naples to my urgent cry, "Increase your margin!" They have got to recruit without stint and build 8 "Mastodons" instead of 4 . . . The recruiting has begun! The 8 will follow' (Fisher to Esher, June 30th, 1912).

382: TO MRS. CECIL FISHER

Kilverstone Hall
July 13th, 1912

My sweet Jane,

I expect you will be all alone by the time this reaches you and Cecil off to Berlin, so I must write to cheer you up and make you think of how lovely it will be for you when you return to this heavenly place, which really now is at its *very maximum*. The roses are perfectly splendid . . . We are also fascinated by the forget-me-nots that we put round the King's Tree being alive and flowering. We put them in hurriedly on August 10 last, when Queen Alexandra and her sister came over — got them out of the river, and never expected they would live away from the water. We've put in a few more and I'm watering them every night now, ready for Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria to see when they come over some day soon unexpectedly. . . .

We have got no one here this weekend. It's such a relief! Next week we are going to have Lord Redesdale, who is a great gardener— the best in England, or the world, so people say; Sir Robert Chalmers, who runs Lloyd George at the Treasury and is the real man who made the Budget and Insurance Act — he's a great friend to me; Mr. Garvin, the Editor of the *Observer* and *Pall Mall* [*Gazette*]; and, I think, Mr. Waldorf Astor,[1] who owns both those papers and whom I met at dinner with Bonar Law the other night, and he made great friends with me. And I think the fifth man will be Sir Boverton Redwood, the great oil expert. On Thursday comes for one night Sir William Matthews, who is a very great civil engineer and was President of the Society of Civil Engineers. I've got him on the Royal Commission to do the engineering part of it in building reservoirs for *15 million tons of oil! but this is private!* My idea is to have an artificial inland sea of oil in England, buried underground with pipe lines leading to the coast! On Monday I'm going to London to give my final lecture to Winston Churchill and Sir Francis Hopwood on oil and its application. Tuesday at 9 a.m. I'm with Herkomer for the replica of my picture, and hope to get back here that night. On July 24 I go to a banquet given by the Government to the Canadian Ministers.

Yesterday I wrote 14 letters. I was worn out. It reminded me of

[1] Waldorf (afterwards second Viscount) Astor, Conservative M.P., 1910-1919, proprietor of the *Observer*, 1915-1945, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, ca. 1911-1915.

Cecil, who when he was a little boy was always being given *blanc mange* for dinner! At last he said one day to his nurse: '*I'm worn out with white shape.*' And I feel the same about letters and just hate the very sight of pen and ink! . . .

Always your loving father,

F.

383: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
July 15th, 1912

My beloved E.,

. . . This instant the news has come to me that there are *750* eligible and selected candidates for *60* vacancies for Boy-Artificers at the approaching examination! When I introduced this scheme 8 years ago, *every man's hand was against me*, and the whole might of Trades Unionism inside the House of Commons and out of it was organized against me by Beresford, Custance & Co. *It was a deadly blow to Trades Unionism.* We were dominated by the Engineers! We had to accept Engine-Room Artificers for the Navy who had been brought up on making bicycles! *Now*, these boys are suckled on the marine engine! and they have knocked out the old lot completely. Our very best Engine-Room Artificers now in the Navy are these boys! Not one of my colleagues or anyone else supported me! *Do you wonder that I don't care a d—n what anyone says!*

The man you are going to see on Wednesday — how has he recognized that we are at this moment stronger than the Triple Alliance? The leaders of both political parties — how have they recognized that 19 millions sterling of public money *actually allocated* was saved and the re-arrangement of British sea power so stealthily carried out that not a sign appeared of any remark by either our own or by any foreign diplomatists until an obscure article in the *Scientific American* by Admiral Mahan (*reproduced by a d—d fool in England*) stated that of a sudden he (Mahan) had discovered that 88 per cent of the sea power of England is concentrated on Germany! But the most ludicrous thing of all is that up to this moment no one has really recognized that the *Dreadnought* caused such a deepening and dredging of German harbours and their approaches, and a new Kiel Canal, as to cripple Germany up to A.D. 1915, and make their coasts accessible, which were previously denied to our ships because of their heavy draught for service in all the world! But I don't complain! I've *never said* or *written* a public word, and I don't mean

to. What I rub into you now is that I know the course I am pursuing is right and WILL WIN!

Yours for evermore, F.

384: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

Kilverstone Hall
August 2nd, 1912

Private

My dear E.,

Yesterday we had another interesting time of it with the Canadians at Defence Committee, and Borden[1] made a long statement which, no doubt, you'll get, as [a] shorthand writer was there, and then he attended whilst other items were discussed, so as to let him (I suppose) see how the business was conducted. (I was amused how a fly was thrown over Kitchener!) The Canadians left before the end of the meeting to attend a big lunch, and lucky they did, as we had a regular 'set-to' with Lloyd George (supported by Harcourt and Morley chiefly) against the provision of defence for Cromarty as a shelter anchorage for the Fleet, and the Prime Minister adjourned the discussion to the Cabinet, as the temperature got hot! As you know, I've always been 'dead on' for Cromarty and hated Rosyth, which is an unsafe anchorage — the whole Fleet in jeopardy the other day — and there's that beastly bridge which, if blown up, makes the egress very risky without examination. However, Haldane whispered to me that it would be made all right in the Cabinet. One or two of them are making a dead set against Winston. Also Cromarty is strategically better than Rosyth.[2] . . .

Yours always, F.

P.S. Also Lloyd George had a row about the airships — Seely's Sub-Committee. We *must* have airships.

[1] Robert (afterwards Sir Robert) L. Borden, Prime Minister of Canada, 1911-1920.

[2] Fisher had, as he had written Esher on January 23rd, 1910, 'got [a naval base at] Rosyth delayed 4 years as NOT being the right thing or the right place, and hoping for our Kiel [a Forth to Clyde] Canal; but though I succeeded in the delay, alas! I did not in the substitution'. Fisher always preferred Cromarty to Rosyth as a shelter anchorage for the Fleet. A C.I.D. Sub-Committee on the North-East Coast Defences, with Haldane as Chairman, recommended (November 29th, 1912) that Cromarty, 'as a floating second-class naval base and war anchorage in a position of great strategic importance, should be fortified on a scale sufficient to deter armoured vessels, torpedo-craft, and submarines from attack'. This was a victory for the Churchill-Fisher position, but the delay in Rosyth and the fight for Cromarty help to explain the want of protected bases and docks in the North Sea. The decision to make Cromarty, also Scapa Flow, defensible came late in the day. Neither they nor Rosyth were ready when war came, so that the Grand Fleet did not have a single safe harbour on the east coast. This kept Jellicoe on the move in the first months. Fisher must be held partly to blame for the want of protected bases and docks in the North Sea.

385: TO VISCOUNT ESHER[1]

Admiralty, Whitehall
August 7th, 1912

Private
My beloved E.,

I still hate Rosyth and fortifications and East Coast docks, and said so the other day! But what we desire at Cromarty is for another purpose — to fend off German cruisers, possibly by an accident of fog or stupidity, getting loose on our small craft taking their ease or refuelling in Cromarty (oil will change this in time, but as yet we have for years coal-fed vessels to deal with), but Seely writes me all is well, so one need not fuss any more. The incident is closed! . . .

I've got enthusiastic colleagues on the oil business! They are all bitten! Internal combustion rabies!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I do wish you could come here some day! I've had 21 professors of sorts here lately!

386: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Admiralty, Whitehall
August 20th, 1912

Burn this and *never allude to its contents.*
Private and Secret
My beloved Friend,

Have no fear about any corner in oil! Imagine for instance what would happen if the Royal Commission resigned and I stated in my place in Parliament the reason why? *Legislation can deal with any corner if once the mass of the people be roused!* Millions of money can't stand against masses of the people! *Never has!* Oil is only a passing factor! Industrial alcohol (for engines) from potatoes and cereals may quite likely be the coming force, or else possibly the marvellous results being achieved in America by turning every atom of coal into gas by the agency of oil and other products. Any day oil may fall with

[1] In reply to Esher's letter of August 4th (*Esher*, III, 104-5, slightly edited), which condemned 'the habit of throwing away millions upon fixed defences which turn out useless', and asked: 'Is it CERTAIN that any shelter anchorage is wanted on the EAST coast? Your idea, if I remember, was very different, some time back. Every battleship on the WEST coast. Watching to be done by your cruiser squadrons. Only too delighted if the German Fleet *does* come out, etc.! Surely the manœuvres . . . show that any anchorage on the East Coast is unshelterable and highly dangerous.'

a bang! I know nothing of Esher or Sarawak. I hardly imagine anything of the sort could be done without reference to our Commission. Nevertheless, if you know anything, you are right to raise the alarm.

The barometer that shows me the potent power of our Commission is a very unexpected letter from Northcliffe this morning![1] That man always has his ear on the ground listening for the tread of the coming millions! I've asked him here to stay. If only the Germans knew, they'd shoot Diesel like a dog! No one as yet has the faintest glimmering of the wonderful English gift given by Providence in internal combustion propulsion, and I'm not going to tell anyone either!

Yours for evermore,

F.

387: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

September 14th, 1912

My beloved E.,

. . . In the second week of December we have an illustration on the scale of 12 inches to a foot of producing oil from coal. Twenty-five tons a day will be produced as an example. All that is required is to treble the retorting plant of all gas works in the United Kingdom where there is a Mayor and Corporation, and to treble their 'through put' of coal! *This is all sacredly secret!* We get two million tons of oil that way! We only want one million!

I addressed the Directors of the S.E. & Chatham Railway last Tuesday, and hope I persuaded them to build a motor vessel of 24 knots between Calais and Dover, and proved to them they could save an hour between Paris and London — the whole side of the vessel falls down and makes a gangway on to a huge pontoon at Calais and Dover, and all the passengers march straight out ('*Every man straight before him*,' like the Israelites did at Jericho, and the walls fell down before them!). No more climbing up Mont Blanc up a narrow precipitous gangway from the steamer to the jetty in the rain, and an old woman blocking you with her parcels and umbrella jammed by the stanchions, and they ask her for her ticket and she don't know which pocket it's in! and the rain going down your neck

[1] Northcliffe wondered whether the Fisher committee was 'thinking of the use of alcohol as a motive power . . . as a substitute for petrol . . . We have no petrol in England, but we have any number of means of making alcohol' (Northcliffe to Fisher, August 19th, 1912).

all the time! A glass roof goes over the motor vessel — she has no funnels, and her telescopic wireless masts wind down by a 2 horse-power motor so as not to go through the glass roof.

But all this is nothing to H.M.S. 'Incomparable' — a 25-knot battleship that will go round the whole earth without refuelling! Imagine!!! With armament and armour *beyond dreams!* The imagination has not yet depicted her power! 45 knots motor boats carrying 21-inch torpedoes carried in a central tank behind 16-inch armour, where funnels and boilers used to be! *Think what they will do!* But no more! 'I am *satis*'! The plans of her will be finished next Monday, and I wrote last night to Winston to say I proposed in my capacity as a private British citizen to go over in three weeks' time in the White Star *Adriatic* to get Borden to build her at Quebec. The building yard put up [there] by Vickers is under a guarantee to build a Dreadnought in Canada in May, and the great Dreadnought dock left Barrow for Quebec on August 31st. No English Government would make this plunge, which is why I propose going to Canada and take the Vickers people to make their bargain for building!

Keep all sacredly private, please, and you had better burn this letter at once.

Yours always,

Fisher

388: TO VISCOUNT ESHER

September 20th, 1912

My dear E.,

. . . My idea now is to raise a syndicate to build the 'Non-Pareil'! A few millionaires would suffice, and I know sufficient of them to do it. All the drawings and designs quite ready. The one *all-pervading*, *all-absorbing* thought is to get in first with motor ships before the Germans! Owing to our apathy during the last two years, they are ahead [with internal combustion engines]! *They have killed 15 men in experiments* [with oil engines] *and we have not killed one!* And a d—d fool of an English politician told me the other day that he thinks this creditable to us!

Without any doubt (I have it from an eyewitness of part of the machinery for her at Nuremberg) a big German oil-engine cruiser is under weigh! We *must* press forward. We must not strain at the gnat of perfection and swallow the camel of unreadiness! These d—d

politics [politicians?] are barring the way — Laurier in Canada[1] and W.C.'s enemies in the Cabinet over here. '*What!* ANOTHER *Dreadnought revolution!*' and these boneless fools chatter with fear like apes when they see an elephant! The imagination can't picture that '*a greater than the Dreadnought is here!*' Imagine a silhouette presenting a target *33* per cent less than any living or projected battleship! No funnels — no masts — no smoke — she carries over 5,000 tons of oil, enough to take her round the world without refuelling! *Imagine what that means!* Ten motor boats carried on board in an armoured pit in the middle of her, where [the] funnels and the boilers used to be. Two of these motor boats are over 60 feet long and go *45 knots!* and carry 21-inch torpedoes that go 5 miles! *Imagine these let loose in a sea fight!* Imagine projectiles over a ton weight! going a mile or more further than even the 13½-inch gun (which gun has rightly staggered humanity!). Yes! my beloved friend! that 13½-inch gun that all my colleagues (bar one! and he is our future Nelson! [Jellicoe]) thought me mad to force through against unanimous disapproval! *and see where we are now in consequence!* We shall have SIXTEEN British Dreadnoughts with the 13½-inch gun before the Germans HAVE ONE!!! So it will be with the '*Non-Pareil*'! WE HAVE GOT TO HAVE HER!

Yours always,

Fisher

I've worked harder over this job than in all my life before! 3 months since I came over and I've left no stone unturned!

389: TO SIR CHARLES PARSONS

Reston Lodge
Petersham, Surrey
October 6th, 1912

Dear Sir Charles,

. . . The *one sole vital point* for the Navy about the internal combustion engine is that you get rid of a mass of funnels. I've seen a fleet 20 miles off and each ship spelling her name to me by her funnels! And a single jet of black smoke has in my experience disclosed a fleet 40 miles off! And you cannot with the most perfect appliances for steam-raising with oil avoid some such accident. It's

[1] Sir Wilfrid Laurier, onetime Liberal Prime Minister of Canada (1896-1911).

really a vital fighting question to get rid of the funnels and have a telescopic hollow mast to get rid of the gases and to convey the wireless. And Vickers have perfected such a mast.

Yours very truly,

Fisher

390: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines
Winchester House
21 St. James's Square, S.W.
October 13th, 1912

Dear Corbett,

You are very kind. I've adopted your alterations in the proof. On March 25 we have a nice house on Ham Common for 21 years, and that should be time enough for this Royal Commission to make a smokeless England[1] — a home-oil Navy — a home-manured farmer — the Chilian nitrate cut out of English coal — a gas cooking stove in every pauper's home, and the residue of the coal a luxury in an open fire at 18 shillings a ton for the rich! *All that I promise you!* I've got the Chairman of the Gas Light and Coke Company coming to see me to-morrow about doing it! *Won't he sit up when he hears!!!*

'There's nothing you can't have if you want it enough'!

Yours,

Fisher

We will entice you and your wife to Ham! Such a Cedar of Lebanon to sit under! A great man in literature came to see me last Thursday to beg me to emerge and smash my vilifiers! I said to him that Archbishop Whately said . . . Just see what things happen! They bury a play-actor like Irving in Westminster Abbey and ignore Booth and Barnardo![2] But as the Prophet Jeremiah remarks in his 51st chapter (I think): 'The Lord God of recompense[s] shall [surely] requite'!

[1] Corbett, an active member of the executive committee of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, was keenly interested in Fisher's ideas about a 'smokeless England'.

[2] The Rev. William Booth, General and Commander-in-Chief of the Salvation Army, which he founded in 1878, had died on August 20th, 1912; Sir Henry Irving, the first actor to be knighted (1895), had died in 1905 and been buried in Westminster Abbey; Thomas J. Barnardo, British philanthropist (d. 1905), known for his establishment, from 1867, in England and Canada of 'Dr. Barnardo's Homes' for orphaned and destitute children.

391: TO SIR CHARLES PARSONS

Petersham, Surrey
October 14th, 1912

Dear Sir Charles,

. . . The German Admiralty have certainly arranged for a battle-cruiser with I.C. engines with the Nuremberg firm to be commenced in the near future. We've got to keep ahead of the Germans.

Vickers are absolutely confident they can produce a 25-knot Dreadnought equal to any building or projected ship and capable of going round the earth without refuelling. They are prepared to go 'nap' on it *with 68,000 H.P.!* on 4 shafts. Oram and the Admiralty are timorous — *of course they are!* They were timorous with the water-tube boiler! They were timorous at the turbine going into the *Dreadnought*! We've got to push them over the precipice! Half a loaf is better than no bread.

They strain at the gnat of perfection and swallow the camel of 'the unready'. What breaks my heart is that you can't see your way to associate the turbine with the principle of internal combustion propulsion. Isn't there some metal that will stand the heat? Dr. Beilby[1] will invent it for you. Can't you see your way to some experiment?

Yours very truly,

Fisher

392: TO REAR-ADMIRAL (RET.) SIR SYDNEY EARDLEY-WILMOT

October 18th, 1912

My dear Wilmot,

In continuation of my letter this morning I would like you to know of the following lovely incident! An officer from the War College, lecturing a few days ago at one of the Ports, expatiated on what he called 'the negative value of the secondary armament'! It reminds me of the Chinese! They beat tom-toms and carry horrible pictures into battle to frighten their enemies! The 6-inch gun is to make a d—d noise and so give confidence to the crew and frighten by their smoke (their shot won't get there!) the junks of the enemy! — and yet, further damnation, they are going to rear up another deck

[1] George (afterwards Sir George) T. Beilby, a member of Fisher's committee, Chairman of the Royal Technical College, Glasgow, 1907-1923, and expert in fuel economy and smoke prevention in connection with coal consumption.

protected by weak armour to carry these d—d 6-inch guns, increasing the silhouette enormously and also the holocaust! The sweet and lovely thing is that from Winston Churchill down to the Midshipmen the cry now is let us have plenty of 12-pounders as in the dear old *Dreadnought*, BECAUSE 'instantaneous rapidity of fire is vital against torpedo and submarine attack'.

You might well devote a chapter to this.[1] Most unfortunately I have not been able to discover a most splendid memorandum by Bacon, where he points out that even at close ranges the Big Gun utterly wipes out the secondary armament and is its infinite superior in destructive effect.

Yours,

F.

393: TO SIR CHARLES PARSONS

Bellevue Lodge
Richmond, Surrey
November 3rd, 1912

Dear Sir Charles,

I so well remember being told it was a 'vital objection' to the turbine — the large number of blades! '*An insuperable objection!*' I always think your triumph so great because of the multiplicity of your enemies! However, I am only writing this to suggest to you whether it is feasible to try your fascinating plan in one of the seven new Admiralty vessels under order with internal combustion engines. The last three of 10,000 tons displacement are yet unallocated.

We are looking forward to seeing you on November 21, and I hope Sir John Jellicoe will be with us. It's all-important he should be; *he is the coming man*, or rather *he has come!*

I wish you could see your way to the continuance of the turbine in connection with the internal combustion principle. *Remember*, *we can't have funnels for future fighting!* And we want the armament amidships, or more amidships than boilers will allow of. It means victory to see the enemy before they see you and to be absolutely devoid of a

[1] Presumably Fisher was referring to Eardley-Wilmot's little book, *The Battle of the North Sea in 1914* (1st ed., London, 1912, under the pseudonym 'Searchlight'; 2nd ed., London, 1913), a fictional account of a naval battle between the British and German Fleets.

puff of inadvertent black smoke through some accident with the oil-spraying apparatus![1]

Yours truly,

Fisher

394: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Richmond, Surrey
Christmas Eve, 1912

My dear Arnold White,

This is just a Christmas line to wish you all your heart desires! MY desire is to get back to the sun at Naples and the '*dolce far niente*'! out of this everlasting damp we get in England! No wonder our grass is green and our lawns invincible! I see one newspaper says I *live* at the Admiralty now and have a room next the First Lord! and the *National Review* (as usual) pours vitriol! What fools we all are to go on working to the last gasp! I've often given you Dryden!

> 'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power
> What has been, has been, and I have had my hour.'

Well! oil and the oil engine are now booming, but we are sadly behind in this country through prosperity in the shipbuilding trade. No looking ahead! . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

395: TO ARNOLD WHITE

February 25th, 1913

My dear Arnold White,

I am grieved to hear of your being under an oculist. I expect you have been overdoing your eyes. Can't you take a holiday? I beg you to trouble no further about the *Dublin Express* Correspondent. *It does not now signify*, so please do no more! I am very busy. '*Otium est magnum et praevalebit*'!

Ever yours,

F.

[1] The thrice-postponed meeting of Parsons and the Royal Commission took place on November 21st. For the proceedings, see Rollo Appleyard: *Charles Parsons, His Life and Work* (London, 1933), pp. 175-8. The argument continued until the outbreak of the war.

I see another General is to be deported into Trafalgar Square! Why don't they pull down the Duke of York, who sold commissions to haberdashers via Mrs. Clarke![1] (*'Qui facit per alium facit per se'!* When Nelson looks round London, he only sees one Naval Officer, Sir John Franklin,[2] and he died from ice, not war! Where are Hawke of Quiberon, Rodney, Cornwallis, Howe, Benbow, and all Nelson's Captains? Was this country made by sailors or soldiers? If monuments [are] any guide, then the sea had no victories for us!

396: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Richmond, Surrey
March 13th, 1913

Private

My dear Arnold White,

I've not inspired Yexley directly or indirectly, but without doubt some one has given him the inwards of oil and the oil engine! So I send you the enclosed, which you need neither return or reply to, as worth your reading and condensing into your bovril beatitudes!

It's wonderful to me how little in front of their own noses the whole population ever looks! *Submarines are the coming Dreadnoughts* and *aviation will* SURELY *supplant cruisers*, and only such a brain as Balfour's (with whom I lunched last Friday) seems capable of this grasp of the future![3] *What a brave man he is!* He doesn't care a d—n for his party and joins with Asquith to investigate a new Repington *réchauffé* of invasion!

Burn this.

Yours till death,

F.

Don't answer.

[1] To make way for King Edward's statue, that of Field-Marshal the first Baron Napier of Magdala, opposite the Athenaeum, was being moved into Trafalgar Square. Napier had made his name in India and Abyssinia in the mid-nineteenth century. Mary Anne Clarke, mistress of the Duke of York, second and favourite son of George III, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, evoked a scandal in 1809 when she was found to be trafficking in Army commissions and promotions. The Duke was forced to resign his command.

[2] Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin, primarily an Arctic explorer, discoverer of the northwest passage, whose last expedition (1845-1847) failed to return.

[3] Fisher also told Balfour at that '*tête-à-tête* of his seeking . . . all manœuvres are d—d rot! When you are not being fired at, you act quite differently to when you are! But what manœuvres ARE good for is they train nerves in navigation and God's risks' (Fisher to White, March 17th, 1913).

397: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

4 Carlton Gardens
Pall Mall, S. W.
Private May 6th, 1913

Dear Lord Fisher,

One line of thanks, and acknowledgement, for your letter and its enclosure.

You know how long, and how earnestly, I have preached the case of submarines. The question that really troubles me is not whether *our* submarines could render the enemy's position intolerable, but whether *their* submarines could not render *our* position untenable. If it be true (a) that a large type of submarine can, so far as its sea-going qualities, etc. are concerned, blockade a hostile port for very long periods, and (b) that it cannot be driven off either by other submarines or by any other known method of attack, how are we to prevent a blockade of *all* our ports in time of war? In other words, what is to prevent the Germans sealing up every port, military or commercial, round our whole coast — and this whatever our superiority in battleships and cruisers might happen to be? That's the question *I* want answered!

Yours ever,

Arthur James Balfour

398: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

4 Carlton Gardens
Private May 20th, 1913

My dear Lord Fisher,

Thanks very much for your memorandum of the 15th.

(a) As regards invasion, I have never doubted, and do not doubt, that the development of the submarine must increase the hazards of that very hazardous operation, and so far therefore the development of this new weapon increases our security.

(b) I also agree with the argument that the shortness of Germany's sea-board, as compared with ours, renders it easier for us to blockade them with submarines than for them to blockade us.

(c) But I am, nevertheless, not clear that, from the point of view of blockade, the advantages are all on our side.

No maritime blockade would cut Germany off from her external markets, or from her sources of external supply. We, being an island

and having as yet no channel tunnel, are differently situated. Even a channel tunnel would be no more than a mitigation of a maritime blockade.

The questions, therefore, that I ask myself are:—What would be the effect on freights produced by the knowledge that the approaches of our half-dozen chief ports were infested by submarines? and could these submarines be driven away?

You assume in your memorandum that a submarine, going through narrow waters, such as the Straits of Dover, if these were carefully guarded, would be in a perilous position. You also suggest that submarines with guns could drive off other submarines. I am not sure that I very clearly understand how it is possible either to prevent submarines from freely using the Straits of Dover, whatever naval precaution we might adopt; nor how one submarine can compel another submarine either to fight or abandon its station. If these operations are impossible, or, without being impossible, are extremely difficult, we might conceivably find ourselves surrounded by seas in which no enemy's battleship could live, and which no enemy's troops could cross, but which would yet be as little under our control, for military or commercial purposes, as if we were the inferior maritime power. If there was any chance of such an extreme hypothesis being realized, we should not only be useless allies to any friendly power on the Continent, but we should have the utmost difficulty in keeping ourselves alive.

Should we not, among other things, have to reconsider our views about the capture or rather the destruction (for a submarine could not capture) of private property at sea?

Yours ever,

Arthur James Balfour

399: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Langham House
Ham Common, Surrey
[May 25th, 1913]

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I am preparing a further memorandum in reply to your further two questions:—

(1) Effect on freights through fears of submarines infesting our chief ports.

(2) Could these submarines be driven away? but I can't have it elaborated till next week, as I am getting German information through Krupp himself, who is providing the new German submarine oil engine. *The oil engine governs the situation!*

The appalling thing is our Admirals are so blind to these developments! but it always has been so. There's an Admiralty Board Minute of the olden days prohibiting steam being introduced into the Navy! There's another minute to say that as wood floats and iron doesn't, the Board can't authorize iron ships! Lord C. Beresford wrote an official letter calling submarines 'playthings'! Sir Arthur Wilson hates oil and loves coal!

Yours truly,

Fisher

400: TO SIR FRANCIS HOPWOOD

June 16th, 1913

My dear Hopwood,

This day fortnight the special Oil Committee (recently set up) and also the Royal Commission meet for three days (and all day) to draw up and present a report on the chemical and blending treatment of oils and to finish off evidence (especially by Professor Junkers, Mr. Marshall Stevens, and Mr. Powell) on the oil engine and the storage and transport of oil up to date. This will exhaust everything that has to be said on the subjects referred to the Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines, and we then adjourn till Monday, September 8th, *though we could quite well submit our final report and terminate the Royal Commission this day fortnight*, but Winston wrote so appreciative a letter desirous of the continuation of the Royal Commission till the Oil Committee had completed its task that with great reluctance we continued. I say with great reluctance, because all the Royal Commissioners feel that there is absolutely no more to be said on the subject than what appears in our some thousand pages of print, and our conclusions (as presented in our Reports and official letters) are definite and conclusive, and no good purpose is served by our continuance in being. Indeed it only leads to false inferences that there is yet something to be discovered — *and there is not!*

As stated in our Report of November 1912:—

(1) The employment of oil is an essential and vital fighting requisite and imperatively necessary for the supremacy of the British Navy.

(2) As oil don't grow in England, it must be stored in vast quantities, with the excellent result that it don't — [?] deteriorate like coal.

(3) That the internal combustion engine is equally a vital fighting necessity for the British Navy.

This is the pith and marrow of what we have been reiterating in report after report and letter after letter. To erect tanks ashore and to buy oil is an administrative business and no part of the Royal Commission's business, but we should be d—d idiots if it was not plain to all of us that you cannot get millions of tons of oil on favourable financial terms, *or even get the oil at all, unless you follow the commercial business method of secrecy and celerity*, otherwise up goes the price, or more usually some one else buys the oil while you are haggling! If you doubt this, refer to the evidence of those kings of oil — Mr. Deterding, Mr. F. Lane, Sir T. Bowring, and Sir M. Samuel!

So, you see, the Royal Commission has nothing more to do, except, of course, that oil-features vary from one week's end to the other and a fresh '*oil hare*' can be consequently started every week, but that don't affect the main recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The witnesses I have named that we are going to interview this day fortnight will only further verify our expressed views, but they are all three very big men and they will make a nice climax. Powell is the head of the Standard Oil Co., Marshall Stevens has been travelling in America on the storage and transport of oil — he is a Manchester millionaire — and Junkers' engine is the very last thing in internal combustion. I write all this to put you *au courant* with our position and with the view of terminating the existence of the Royal Commission in the early autumn. Winston knows my views, but if you think fit you can show him this letter.

Yours always,

Fisher

For many, many years I have been unceasingly and assiduously devoting both my waking and even my sleeping thoughts to submarines, and *oil and the oil engine* is the germ of their vitality. Kindly mark my words that the coming German submarines (with a radius of action extending to the Argentine, and a 4-inch gun) will effectually blockade all our principal commercial ports, and the only mitigation of such a blockade is a series of Channel tunnels from Dover to Calais. *The oil engine will govern all sea-fighting, and all sea-fighting is going to be governed by submarines*, and yet like d—d fools we

are only spending as much money on them as the Germans and we are behind them in the oil engine, and so like the French we are fatally hankering after steam engines in submarines.[1] . . .

401: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Zum Grünen Kreuz
Marienbad
August 19th, 1913

Private and Confidential
My dear Winston,

Your excellent letter of August 15th has just reached me here, and I have no doubt at all that all my colleagues will join me in fully assenting to your three statements as to the general purport of the recommendations of the Royal Commission. We are to have plenary meetings of the Royal Commission on the last Tuesday and Wednesday in October, when I will get their assent and write to you officially for public quotation. I shall also put in my official letter that it has been ever present to the Royal Commissioners that the responsibility for fixing the standard of reserves rests solely and wholly with the Board of Admiralty, and that the only reason for the Royal Commissioners mentioning in their Report that large reserves, based upon peace requirements, should be accumulated in the Country, was not the doubt as to there ever being an insufficiency of oil, but the peculiar circumstances of the oil industry, rendering it dependent upon the vagaries, which no oil expert has yet fathomed, as to the output of oil areas. As Mr. Deterding (the greatest of oil kings) said in his delicious evidence (he has just swallowed Sir Robert Balfour and the Californian oilfields!): 'There is not anybody who can be certain of his oil supply; oilfields in my own experience which at the time yielded 18,000 barrels a day within five days went down to 3,000 barrels, without the slightest warning.'

In the print I sent you in April 1913 — 'Memorandum on Oil and its Fighting Attributes' — I ended in large capitals and italics!

[1] On the same subject Fisher had written Jellicoe (Second Sea Lord, 1912-1914, in succession to Battenberg) on June 1st: Krupp's were making hundreds of submarine engines '*of a far larger power than ours in our submarines* . . . I am extremely anxious about the Admiralty development of the submarine. *The more I hear, the more d—d fools they seem to be!* I've written a memorandum on the subject, but if I sent it to Winston, it would mean open war with the Admiralty, so I withhold it. The most fatal error imaginable would be to put steam engines in a submarine. The "oversea" submarine now building by Vickers should not be exceeded in size, or you won't be able to use them in the North Sea, *besides other vital reasons*'.

'BUILD RESERVOIRS AND STORE OIL.'

'KEEP ON BUILDING RESERVOIRS AND BUY OIL AT FAVOURABLE RATES WHEN THEY OFFER!' . . .

I see Lord Brassey and others are advocating more ships on foreign stations and so frittering our strength! When Bismarck was attacked in the German Parliament for having no soldiers in Africa and asked what defence from an attack from the French Congo, he replied, 'A sortie from Metz'!

Yours, Fisher

402: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Marienbad
August 20th, 1913

Dearest Cis,

. . . Your advice is good about our remaining on here as long as we can, for it agrees with me in the most wonderful way! I feel absolutely splendid here always, and it's always the same all the 12 different years I have been here. The *Kreuzbrünnen* in the early morning, combined with the Pilsener *bier*, which I drink both at lunch and dinner, seems my vital restorer! and then the coffee and rolls are really worth coming a thousand miles for, as also the *Prager Schinken* (1½ portions last night for supper!!) and the *Prince Pückler* pudding and the fricandeau of veal, and the spinach! Words fail me!!! I feel 20 years younger always here! . . .

People I don't know come and talk to me and say, 'I hope the cure is doing you good, Admiral', etc., etc. And, of course, a whole lot I know besides: Lord Dunedin, who is Lord Justice General in Scotland (he married Mrs. George Keppel's sister), Sir Rufus Isaacs, Sir Ivor Herbert, Lady Lilian Boyd (who is here by herself), and then the Glasgows and Archie Patterson, and some Russian princes; but we try and avoid all of them as much as we can and have got a very nice sequestered table at the 'Stern', where we are treated *en prince*! . . .

I think the mud baths and the massage and the *Kreuzbrünnen* and the wonderful champagne air here, all combined, will do Mother great good, and she really seems better already. I fear it's dull for her. *I just simply love it!* and wish I was going on to Lucerne and Naples!!!

Fondest love to dear Jane.

Your loving father, F.

403: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR (?)

Marienbad
September 4th, 1913

Private and Secret

. . . The fact is that the whole submarine question has to be dealt with under three distinct phases, quite separate from each other:—

1. If the submarine (as some urgently and with great force and reason advocate) is to be a partial substitute for battleship strength or battleship preponderance and not simply a substitute for destroyers, then the root of the matter is 'surface speed', and the submarine must possess a strategic speed which will enable it effectively to overhaul or circumvent a Battle Fleet, so that it can come into action without fail and be counted on as a decisive weapon. This speed can be attained at the present time and in the immediate future by no other path except by those of size and steam. That is the statement for the Great Phase! Without any doubt whatever a fast Battle Fleet which can be accompanied always by submarines under all circumstances would possess an overwhelming fighting advantage.

2. The Second Phase is that type of submarine — the 'smallest-biggest' submarine — that can go, say, to the Argentine with an oil engine (with oil in the ballast tank) and carry, say, a 3-inch gun and a large supply of small-size Whitehead torpedoes (say, 10-inch). This type lends itself to most important oversea strategy and trade protection.

3. The Third Phase of the submarine is the existing North Sea and coastal type of submarine, which need not be entered upon.

These are three distinct types of submarines for three distinct services, and any state paper which deals with the submarine question must take cognizance of each of these three aspects. . . .

Postscript. It has to be remembered that the latest approved design of submarine is about the limit of size for use in the North Sea to enable her to dive under a Dreadnought in those shallow waters. Also be it remembered very distinctly that the increasing size of the submarine is solely and wholly dependent upon the development of its engine, and that the type of oil engine that can perhaps with facility be adapted for a Dreadnought may be quite impossible for use in a submarine, due to requirements of weight, space, and engine foundation.

404: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Marienbad
September 5th, 1913

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

. . . I had yesterday a long letter from W.C. (the second since I've been here at Marienbad), and he presses me for the third time to go and stay with him in *Enchantress*, *but I am not going!* I don't care about being mixed up with the job lot he gets on board with him, such as Custance & Co., and also he's playing up to certain people who don't have my sympathies at all, never have, and never will! I only just mention this in case he says anything to you by chance. He said to me before I came here, 'did I object to Custance?' I told him I did, and all his retrograde opinions and d—d underhand tactics in the past in association with Beresford (all of whose letters he wrote for him in concert with Sturdee!).

I had a very interesting lunch with the Prime Minister and Kitchener before starting for here. (*I had no lunch!!!*) I will tell you all about it when we meet. Also I had a *tête-à-tête* with Lloyd George, which will also keep till we meet, and also Lulu Harcourt. In fact, between ourselves, I seem to have got back into the infernal whirlpool again! when I particularly wish to avoid some other vituperative woman again calling me 'Bunty'!

But I was called 'a Sun-Dial' and a d—d optimist the other day and I write out the poetry anonymously sent me:

'There he stands amongst the flowers
Counting only sunny hours.
He takes no heed of rain or mist
The brazen-faced old optimist.'

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

405: TO A. G. GARDINER

Langham House
November 11th, 1913

Come to Richmond Underground Station, and Motor Bus 71A brings you here in 12 minutes, and any fool you meet will tell you where I live!

Dear Gardiner,

Yesterday I had sent me [Gardiner's] *Pillars of Society*. Milner[1] and Kitchener are such masterpieces I must send you a line of admiration! (I've ordered a dozen copies to send to kindred spirits!) Your humble servant at the end I suppose isn't bad! When you come down here, any day or hour you like, but telephone when you are coming!, I will add an epitaph for Milner and Kitchener which I think you will accept as apt!

Conscription & Co. is as dead as a herring! Dear Garvin trying to resuscitate the dying embers, but the funny thing that he and old Roberts & Co. don't see is that their efforts tend to more Navy not more Army! But there's a more serious matter than dear old Roberts' futile campaign — the persistent visits of our Generals to the French Headquarters at Nancy and our association thereby with the most secret French war plan for attacking Germany. What a yell of '*Perfide Albion*' by and by, for no English soldier will ever land on the Continent. Let me give you a lecture when you come here!

Yours truly,

Fisher

How funny Beresford and Hirst[2] being in the same boat attacking me over the Dreadnought era!

> 'And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.'[3]

No one gives me credit for being the greatest 'economist' that ever lived! Not a keel-plate was laid for 18 months! If we had not dramatized, we shouldn't have paralysed! And Germany spent 19 millions sterling digging out mud instead of 'digging out' in ship-building on a new Kiel Canal and dredging!

[1] The first Viscount Milner, onetime High Commissioner for South Africa (1897-1905) afterwards holder of important Cabinet posts, 1916-1921.

[2] Francis W. Hirst, Editor of the *Economist*, 1907-1916, and author of *The Six Panics and Other Essays* (London, 1913), whose title essay was a blast at British navy scares.

[3] Luke xxiii, 12.

406: TO JOHN LEYLAND

Langham House
November 15th, 1913

PRIVATE

My dear Leyland,

I've just had sent me enclosed copy of the very best of all Bacon's *Essays*![1] You can keep it! His 'decanter stopper' is quite splendid! He omits one point: the d—d fools talk of close range being in favour of the 6-inch armament! That's a lie! One single shell from the 15-inch gun lodged in the guts of H.M.S. *Custance* would absolutely annihilate as compared with the futile frenzy of inferior guns!

Yours always,

Fisher

407: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Langham House
November 29th, 1913

My dear Corbett,

Add to my great debt to you by kindly dealing drastically with enclosed first proof and make it a work of art, *as the subject deserves it!*[2] Like the coloured worsted thread which runs through all the Government rope made in the Dockyards, so does the oil engine run through all the phases of sea fighting from blockades to battles! The great fighting fact being the similitude to the motor car! No consumption of fuel when at rest, and instantly ready to go at full speed with the engines cold! When I became First Sea Lord, everyone thought me a lunatic for developing the submarine, and I had to hide the money in the Estimates. In consequence NOW we have *3,000* trained submarine officers and men, and are 2 keels to 1

[1] Rear-Admiral Bacon's contribution to the discussion following the reading of a paper, 'Recent Developments in Battleship Type', by Alan H. Burgoyne at the annual meeting of the Institution of Naval Architects, March 12th, 1913 (*Transactions of the Institution of Naval Architects*, LV, Part I, 1913). Fisher's reference is to this passage in Bacon's remarks: 'I should like to draw your attention to some advice that was given many years ago by an old Post Captain to his aide-de-camp who was a midshipman. He said "Boy, if ever you are dining, and after dinner over the wine some subject like politics is discussed, when men's passions are aroused, if a man throws a glass of wine in your face, do not throw a glass of wine in his! throw the decanter stopper" – and that is what we advocates of the heavy gun propose to do, not to slop the 6-in. shot over the shirt front of a battleship, but to go for her with the heaviest guns we can get.'

[2] Fisher was preparing his famous paper on submarine warfare, which was printed in January 1914. The text is in *Records*, pp. 181-5.

against Germany and MORE SO. *It's wonderful what they did in these last manœuvres!*

Yours always,

Fisher

. . . The enclosed is intended for the Committee of Imperial Defence, so you will appreciate that it is very secret.

408: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines
December 1st, 1913

My dear Corbett,

As usual you are splendid! I have adopted your suggestion and dropped the 'Capture at Sea' and also in a note stated your valued views of what a powerful neutral might say to a submarine blockade. I have also dropped the Channel Tunnel, because I see I should play into the hands of the Major-Generals who are constantly going to and fro from our War Office to Nancy as regards our sending an Army to Flanders! As the people of this country will never permit an English soldier to fight on the Continent of Europe in a Franco-German war, there will later on be a hell of a row with France as to '*Perfide Albion*'! And the Tunnel might be a nuisance! Some day I will tell you of a lovely scene I had with these Major-Generals! Why I've not been poisoned, I don't know!

Yours gratefully and in haste, to catch the post!

Fisher

409: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines
December 6th, 1913

My dear Winston,

Herewith what you asked me for long ago. How after reading this you can permit another farthing to be spent on Chatham or dredging the Medway will be beyond my comprehension, and you ought to close up Rosyth just as it is. *Spend no more* and gradually migrate the personnel of Chatham Dockyard to Rosyth and sell Chatham and the Medway to the London Port Authority, as I

nearly succeeded in doing when I was First Sea Lord! Anyhow, I stopped Rosyth for three solid years, but dear Tweedmouth funked the Tory Party. *We never wanted a Dockyard on the East Coast!* No wounded ship in the North Sea would go anywhere except inside the Dover Straits. You want FORTY feet in the Medway for a wounded Dreadnought to go to Chatham. (However, there NEVER will be any wounded ships to go to Chatham.) They are asking you for a quarter of a million sterling for 27 feet!!! You never COULD dredge 40 feet — the mud would keep on falling in!

Yours always,

Fisher

Postscript. Against immense Parliamentary opposition and solely through the personal backing of Mr. Balfour, we discharged upwards of 6,000 Dockyard workmen before the Unionist Government left office this day eight years ago. *Alas! they have all been re-entered, and more also*, by a Government supposed to be intent on economy (there being nothing in this world so expensive as a Dockyard workman!), and to the great detriment of the private trade and the obtaining of foreign shipbuilding orders. E.g., the Germans are building submarines for all nations; *we are not building one!* We are building them at Chatham instead of employing private firms and so qualifying them to get foreign orders. In case of a sudden expansion of submarine building, Germany would be able to 'best' us! It makes it easy all round to enter Dockyard workmen — no one ever fights against it! — and the Navy exists for the Dockyards, instead of the Dockyards for the Navy![1]

410: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Langham House
December 11th, 1913

My dear Jellicoe,

Your letter this moment come. *Of course I shall study all you say*, but from the day I was 12½ [13½] years old, when in a sailing line

[1] Churchill replied (December 12th): 'There can be no question of abandoning Chatham, in which scores of millions have been sunk and which is the home of a third of the Fleet and almost its best recruiting ground. As for the Dockyard workmen, it is socially just that men who work all their lives faithfully for the State should have permanency and pension guaranteed them, just like Admirals!'

of battleship we tried to get shelter in the Medway and were humbugged by the bar and the shoals, and eventually lost four anchors, I have hated and detested the neighbourhood of the Nore as any place for our Fleet at any time, and this wonderful development of the submarine comes along as a token of Providence to get clear of the beastly hole with all despatch! However, I will brood over what you have written, but remember the great principle of the Stock Exchange is to '*cut your loss*'.

For ever yours, and of course I am wrong if you say so.

Yours,

Fisher

411: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Langham House
December 30th, 1913

My dear Jellicoe,

Please keep the print, and I was rejoiced to hear of your having written that memorandum to the First Lord about submarines. It's a real danger the German progress in large submarines.

I have been hearing a good deal of the Estimates fight. What I earnestly pray you to bear in mind is the vital fact that the Sea Lords have nothing whatever to do with 'POLICY' — that is the sole business and responsibility of *Parliament*! It is NOT for the Sea Lords to argue what countries we shall be in alliance with or otherwise. But when Parliament has laid down the '*policy*' (whatever it is, whether 2 keels to 1 or 60 per cent, or any other scale), then the Sea Lords come into the business and say that the standard is or is not being adhered to. If the Sea Lords (as Beresford and others have so often urged them to do) ever try to dictate to Parliament, they will be swept away, and instead of a Board of Admiralty we shall have a Secretary of State, who will be an autocrat.

Yours for ever,

Fisher

412: TO J. A. SPENDER

Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines
Secret January 26th, 1914

My dear Spender,

. . . I wrote to Winston in the exact sense of your letter,[1] and he wrote me a most loving reply! and wished to God I was with him as First Sea Lord! He has no turn for economy, nor is there a single one with that gift at the Admiralty at present! NOT ONE! Nor would a Parliamentary Enquiry Committee be any use either. The one [and] only real man who can effect economy is the First Sea Lord, for this reason: no d—d fool can say to him, 'Such and such an item is vitally necessary for the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war'. He replies, 'You be d—d!' and cuts the item out! I speak with experience. I was Chairman of about 20 committees, and we got rid of 19 millions sterling of parasites dead and alive!

Yours,

F.

413: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Langham House
Secret February 3rd, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

Confirming the sad truth that we have only 27 submarines, built or building, suited for oversea work in all weathers off, say, the German Coast—while Germany has FORTY-SIX: *yesterday* (February 2) information reached me from the Danish Engineer Manager of Burmeister & Wains new works at Glasgow (set up under Lord Pirrie's financial backing) THAT OF HIS OWN KNOWLEDGE the Germans are going ahead of us very rapidly indeed in submarine development, and that it is remarked amongst his expert colleagues at Copenhagen that England is in a very critical state owing to the disparity of our numbers of submarines '*suited for oversea work*', as compared with the Germans. His firm at Copenhagen make engines for submarines and he gives very interesting information of the Danish management of the sub-

[1] Spender had written to Fisher (January 25th): 'Winston must have his programme, but he ought to have got it for a less sum than he demands. His weakness is that he is an extravagant administrator in detail and spends a lot of money, which might be saved, on unessentials.'

marines. He says they make it a practice to lay on the bottom in the Danish submarines, owing to the traffic of the German destroyers and submarines who are perpetually exercising in the Belts, to the great annoyance and in spite of the protests of the Danish Government. He says the Danish Government now consider themselves in a very good position for dealing with German aggression, owing to the Danish development of submarines. They put out all the Danish lights lately at a preconcerted signal on a pitch-dark night, and in consequence German destroyers were discovered high and dry on the beach next morning! *We are in a bad way!*[1]

Yours,

F.

414: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Langham House
March 3rd, 1914

Secret and Private

My dear Corbett,

I can't refrain from sending you a few lines to tell you my joy at hearing your name praised here at a plenary meeting in regard to your valued work for the Navy, and I hope the words spoken will bear some fruit, to your deserved honour. However, memories are, alas! short, and ingratitude damnably prevalent, *but I hope!*

Don't trouble to reply.

Yours always,

Fisher

I find I want to ask you a question. Can you remember if you kindly helped me in the preparation of enclosed secret [Channel Tunnel] memorandum from the Admiralty to the Committee of Imperial Defence? If not, what do you think of it? Please keep it very private, as we are now fighting over it. I was in favour lately of Channel Tubes for bringing oil, but I had to give it up, as I found it was going to be worked to the detriment of the Navy.

[1] More on the submarine theme, in a letter to Jellicoe, January 25th: 'I told him [Churchill] last week for the twentieth time since he became First Lord that the weak point of his administration is the neglect of submarines: four years to-day I left the Admiralty, *and then we had 12 more submarines than we have now*, and the Germans were at *zero*; now they are fulfilling their programme of having SEVENTY-TWO, whilst 19 of ours are in their last stage!'

415: FROM JULIAN S. CORBETT

3, Hans Crescent, S. W.
March 6th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

. . . I feel sure I did not help with the Channel Tunnel memorandum. If I had done so, the result would have been no different. I quite agree, and generally, without having studied the subject, I feel the Tunnel — either as a line of supply or attack — could hardly be a factor that would change the course of a war.

The new element — concerning passing an Expeditionary Force through — also has little weight with me. To do that would fix its line of operation and I believe with Sir John Moore[1] and others that that is the last thing we ought to do with it. As soon as its line is known, half its power is gone. At least that is what the old masters of amphibious war thought, but they don't seem to study them much now-a-days. They prefer German strategists. I don't. So if that is what the soldiers want it for, I would rather they did not have it — as at present advised; but there may be new conditions which are beyond my ken.

With very many thanks,
Yours sincerely,

Julian Corbett

416: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Langham House
March 7th, 1914

My dear Corbett,

Sincere thanks for your letter, and what golden words you send me! 'As soon as the line of operation is known, half its power is gone.' It was worth while sending you the print to get you to re-enunciate that splendid truth! which I was talking over with Hankey at Committee of Imperial Defence last Thursday, for the soldiers, as you suspect, are 'dead-on' for German strategy, but I think we have completely pulverized them at our last meeting, but please keep this private. By the way, Hankey is a very great admirer of yours and he

[1] Corbett was presumably referring to General Sir John Moore of Corunna fame, though I am unable to trace the reference.

has the ear as well as the complete confidence of the Prime Minister, so if at any time you want help in that quarter, he's your man! (In fact he's helping you now with others!)

Yours in great haste,

Fisher

417: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA[1]

Langham House
March 30th, 1914

Private and Confidential

My dear Pamela,

Kindly take note of enclosed defence of the King! No wonder the carpet of the backstairs at Buckingham Palace wore out! *But where is Government by the people and Parliamentary control?* This issue is going to be lost sight of! — and Seely saying in his place in Parliament '*that the King is the head of the Army*'! I thought the people governed the Army! And even the Cromwellian John Morley succumbs to the aroma of knee breeches and silk stockings and talks in the House of Lords of '*an august personage*'! I am *never* going to forget that when the Trinity House Elder Brethren had *unanimously* elected the First Lord of the Admiralty to be made an Elder Brother, the King

[1] This letter and the following two are concerned mainly with the Irish crisis, revolving about the violent opposition in Ulster to the Home Rule Bill then before Parliament. Fisher viewed with misgiving the King's 'unconstitutional' efforts to bring about an understanding. What particularly disturbed him at this time was the King's alleged role in the Curragh incident (March 20th). Sir Arthur Paget, commanding the troops in Ireland, had provoked a mutiny on the part of Brigadier-General Hubert Gough, commanding the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, and most of the officers of that brigade, when he presented them with the choice of participating in 'active operations' in Ulster or resigning. Paget claimed, according to Gough's account, that his instructions were 'the direct orders of the Sovereign' and not merely the commands of 'those dirty swine, the politicians'. The King had not been informed of the Government's instructions to Paget, and he had not sanctioned the use of the troops in Ireland to crush the Ulster Volunteers. Gough resumed his command after receiving a written assurance that the Government 'have no intention whatever of taking advantage of their right to use the forces of the Crown to . . . crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill' (Harold Nicolson: *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* [London, 1952], pp. 237-40).

Although the King was apparently blameless, Fisher could write Pamela McKenna on April 7th: 'Don't let go the cry, "*The People's Navy*," "*The Court Army*." I am so afraid all the momentum of this splendid crisis will have expended itself before the General Election.' Writing to her on April 17th, he enclosed a cutting from the *Westminster Gazette* of April 15th, a letter from M. I. Finucane, vice-chairman of the Westminster Liberal Association, to the Prime Minister. The last paragraph, which Fisher underlined, reads: 'The creation of a citizen army, not mainly officered, as hitherto, by members of the privileged caste, and changes in the Articles of War which shall place the military forces of the crown under the complete control of the King's Ministers.'

ordered a sycophant to be substituted! I know of several sycophants besides him in the Cabinet! I had a secret interview with Lord Knollys on March 5 and told him John Ward's speech was coming along! — AND IT CAME![1] *This is the time to sweep the board!* DON'T MISS IT.

Yours,

F.

418: TO A. G. GARDINER

Langham House
March 31st, 1914

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. *Please burn.*

My dear Gardiner,

I hardly think Mr. Frank Harris would print the enclosed unless sure of his facts![2] Have you read the 'apologia' in last *Sunday Times*?[3] *I have never read anything to compare with it in my life!* It is obviously inspired! Imagine Mr. Balfour, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, and Lord Roberts being non-partisan!!! WHAT A JOKE! But what becomes of the great constitutional FACT that the King is simply and solely the voice tube of his Ministers, *to whichever party they belong!* My blood boils!

Yours,

F.

[1] John Ward, a Liberal M.P., had bitterly attacked the Cabinet in the House of Commons, March 24th, because it had permitted the officers who had mutinied in the Curragh incident to go back to duty, apparently upon their own conditions. The very important question for decision, he said, was whether the Army was to continue as a neutral force to assist the civil power, or whether in future the House of Commons, representing the people, was to submit its decisions for approval to a committee of officers. The rights for which the democracy had struggled for ages would be destroyed whenever an aristocratic junta of military men was allowed to decide what the law should be.

[2] Frank Harris, the irresponsible and bizarre Editor of the weekly social gossip paper, *Modern Society*, 1913-1914, had 'stated in his newspaper that the Field-Marshals were in collusion with General Gough as regards his action, and gave a detailed account of what occurred. As he had just done a month's prison, I presume he was sure of his guns!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, April 17th, 1914).

[3] A 'Special Correspondent' had written a long story on the King's role in the crisis (*Sunday Times*, March 29th). 'History was made at Buckingham Palace last week, and the part that the King then took in bringing about a satisfactory arrangement in the triangular struggle that was then taking place between the Government, the leaders in Ulster and the Army will, it is much to be hoped, be placed upon permanent record for the use of the future historian . . . It has to be noted that the King throughout the whole crisis would only consult with the moderate men of either party, and such advice as he received he insisted should only be quite free from any tinge of partisanship and without undue party leaning on one side or the other. Among this group . . . were . . . Lord Curzon of Kedleston, Earl Roberts . . . and Mr. Balfour . . . It is the unanimous opinion of those who have been "behind the scenes" throughout the crisis that the country has recently passed that His Majesty is the one figure that has emerged from it with the greatest credit and added reputation for statesmanship of the highest order.'

I am evading all sorts of sought-after interviews. My impregnable strength is to remain a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, as then I *know* everything! And thereby I've *lately* absolutely succeeded in pulverizing Conscription. . . .

419: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Langham House
April 10th, 1914

Private
My dear Pamela,

. . . *Seely is a liar!*[1] He has made a speech (I have just read) to say he didn't black the King's boots! HE DID! And he came straight back from the King and wrote the addendum beyond what the Cabinet had authorized! There's no getting over it! but perhaps it's wise policy (as your Ernest once said very acutely to me, to throw your net over that 'middle class' feeling that loves a King) and to say no more, — and not to rub Morley's nose it it either (WHICH HE ALSO DESERVES!). Wasn't it lovely what Randolph Churchill said of Morley in 1886 in respect of Morley's apologia in House of Lords for not resigning with Seely.

> 'I have always observed that if there is a thing which it is advisable not to say, he is perfectly sure to say it. He has the most extraordinary talent (one perfectly peculiar to himself) of uttering things absolutely true which are singularly fatal to the cause he is endeavouring to advocate.'

I do so wish Lloyd George would take the duty off tea, sugar, and tobacco (not cigars). *He would sweep up the whole agricultural vote, as the farm labourers now drink nothing but sweetened tea and their tobacco is their one and only luxury!* He could recoup himself by increasing the death duties, by making transfer of property before death equally taxable, and by increasing the income tax of those above *£10,000* a year *pro rata* up to *£100,000* a year. *But I am only an outsider!*

Yours till Hell freezes,

F.

[1] Seely had resigned on March 30th. His speech at Ilkeston, April 9th, was a résumé of his actions in connection with the Army crisis. '. . . all the wild stories about the King having interfered are absolutely untrue. . . .'

420: TO H. H. ASQUITH

[early May 1914]

Subjects:

I. Attack on the British Isles from Oversea.
II. The Channel Tunnel.
III. Insurance of British Shipping in Time of War.

My dear Prime Minister,

I regret I am unavoidably prevented [from] attending the meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence to which you have summoned me on Thursday, May 14th, 1914, to consider (amongst others) the above three subjects, so I venture briefly to write you my views thereon:

I. I fully concur in 62-A, which confirms the decision we reached on the 22nd October, 1908, that invasion is impracticable so long as our naval supremacy is assured against any reasonable probable combination of Powers. If we permanently lose command of the sea, then whatever may be the strength and organization of the Home Force the subjection of the Country to the enemy is inevitable.

II. *The Channel Tunnel:*
When I was First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, a memorandum (68-A) was submitted to the Prime Minister embodying the views of the Board of Admiralty at that date (about January 1907), and Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman fully approved thereof. When lately I was Chairman of the Royal Commission on Fuels and Engines, I tried to go back on that memorandum as a means of getting oil into this country, *but I couldn't — 68-A is impregnable.*

III. *Insurance of British Shipping in Time of War:*
I submit to you a memorandum I have drawn up on the submarine question. I have already given a copy of it to the First Lord of the Admiralty. In my opinion the statements therein contained are irrefutable and they have a momentous bearing on the question of Insurance of British Shipping in Time of War. I venture to ask your earnest attention thereto.[1]

[1] Asquith objected to the circulation of the submarine paper to the Committee of Imperial Defence, and suppressed it (Fisher to Beatty, February 26th, 1915).

Those who lecture on International Law say the civilized world would hold up its hands in horror at such acts of barbarism as a submarine sinking its prey, but yet an enemy can lay mines without outraging propriety! After all, submarines can exercise discretion — mines can't!

It is patent to all that the operation of 'visit' is attended with grave risk nowadays. A few worthless tramp steamers sent out, accompanied by one or two submarines, illustrate this! Up comes the cruiser to 'visit' the tramps, the submarine would give the *coup-de-grâce* to the cruiser. Therefore, when declaring a blockade, it will have to be stated that 'owing to dangers now attending the process of "visit and search" no passes will be issued, and [that] any vessel breaking blockade inwards or outwards will be sunk'.

Yours truly,

Fisher

421: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Langham House
May 22nd, 1914

Secret and Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

Winston induced me to chuck another engagement to lunch with him, and I had an immense talk with him and hope I did him benefit! No one knows his faults better than I do, and as I reminded him yesterday, we had once a pretty big quarrel, which lasted for a whole year of *very bitter enmity*, but instead of only getting *4*, as he wished, and SIX, which we asked for, he forced us to take EIGHT Dreadnoughts!!! Don't you think that was lovely!!! And that oily old Jesuit who sits on the Woolsack [Haldane] was blown up by his own petard! (McKenna found him altering the Navy Estimates with the Prime Minister behind our backs!) *My reminiscences will be delicious!* I've left them to be edited by some American woman and published in the *U.S.A.*!

However, what I am really writing to you about is to ask you whether you are sure that Hamilton[1] will LOYALLY and WHOLEHEARTEDLY carry out the Osborne scheme and all its tributaries, such as Keyham, etc., because (*this is sacredly private*) the King and his pimps are starting another crusade to revert to the old lines, and

[1] Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Hamilton had been designated to succeed Jellicoe as Second Sea Lord. He took over on July 31st (-1916).

Hamilton is a bosom friend of the King, who calls him by his Christian name and who lends him a cottage at Sandringham, and his wife is Colin Keppel's sister![1] Will he be able to resist the courtly influences? If you would sooner not answer, then don't write. He is a better man as an administrator than Warrender.[2] Don't you think so?

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I think you had better burn this, as I always do your letters! . . .

422: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Langham House
May 25th, 1914

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

We look forward to your coming down next Sunday, May 31, with Lady Jellicoe and the children. (I will play with them while you play tennis, as I am getting an expert now, having the McKenna children often here!!!)

I have burnt your letter, and its contents I will keep sacredly secret. Winston distinctly and decidedly told me on Thursday last that he was very soon going to announce your succeeding Callaghan and Callaghan going to Portsmouth. He discussed about Callaghan succeeding you, but said that Callaghan wanted Portsmouth. Also he spoke of Hamilton and Warrender and Jerram.[3] At the moment (*and remembering what you had said to me*) I said that at the moment Hamilton (barring his very close association with the clique that now surrounds the King) seemed the best man. Now the next thing is very private. He said Battenberg[4] was in favour of substituting submarines for a battleship, but that you were against it. It so happened that I summarized to him the very reasons you give in your letter to me:

[1] Rear-Admiral (ret.) Sir Colin Keppel was a member of King George's circle.
[2] Vice-Admiral Sir George Warrender, seventh Baronet, commanding the 2nd Battle Squadron, 1912-1916.
[3] Vice-Admiral Sir Martyn Jerram was Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron, 1913-1915.
[4] Battenberg had succeeded Bridgeman as First Sea Lord in December 1912 and served until replaced by Fisher at the end of October 1914.

(1) It would be fatal to Borden;[1]
(2) It would shatter the battleship standard of strength;
(3) Could the submarines be built?

Nevertheless, since I saw you last I have been hearing still further of the great efforts that Tirpitz is making SURREPTITIOUSLY to increase their submarine strength, and so AT ANY COST I myself say: 'For God's sake, do get on SOMEHOW with building more submarines at once, *no matter what drawbacks*'.

Old Yarrow motored 80 miles to see me on Saturday and he talked to me of our sad case in submarine building. There's not a single foreign order for a submarine in England, and the story is that Vickers will soon be discharging submarine workmen for want of orders (you can verify this by asking Trevor Dawson![2]), and all this time every foreign establishment is chock-full of submarine orders: Fiume, Germany, and Scandinavian and French builders! It's the very first time in our naval history that we have not had foreign orders for every type of warship! The Greek order that Vickers did get was cancelled! WHY?

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

The Prime Minister has asked me to dine with him, but I've declined. I let fly at him about submarines, and he is evidently *greatly moved! but he entreated me to say nothing! Burn this.*

423: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Langham House
June 22nd, 1914

Private

My dear Corbett,

I am indignantly disappointed at not seeing your name in the Birthday Honours, as I was led to understand it was all fixed up, but I suppose the Prime Minister got crowded out as usual at the last moment, and it is he alone and not the Admiralty with whom the matter rests, but I would like you to know for your own appreciation that Winston and Sir H. Jackson and Bethell,[3] all three, were very

[1] The Canadian Naval Aid Bill, providing for the construction of three dreadnoughts for the Royal Navy, had been approved by the Dominion House of Commons, but rejected by the Senate, in May 1913. The deadlock continued into 1914, though the Prime Minister had hopes of reintroducing the bill when the prospect in the Senate was more promising.

[2] Sir Trevor Dawson (afterwards first Baronet), Managing Director of Vickers, Ltd.

[3] Admiral Jackson was Chief of the War Staff, 1913-1914, in succession to Troubridge, and Vice-Admiral Bethell was in command of the Royal Naval War College, 1913-1914.

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